



Collecting
the Now

ON THE FINANCIAL SIDE OF
POSTWAR ART HISTORY

Michael Maizels

Collecting the Now

“Collecting the Now strikes many chords. This is a standard-setting resource in today’s art market, providing the most original, scholarly and insightful analyses of this highly complex environment. Having worked with many of the people profiled in the book, such as Virginia Dwan and Michael Heizer—whose radical work, *Double Negative*, came to The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (MOCA) under my leadership—I also find the book a welcome reminder of the great artists, curators, and collectors whose creativity and dedication made many of our most important cultural events and institutions possible. Kudos to Mr. Maizels.”

—RICHARD KOSHALEK, DIRECTOR, THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, LOS ANGELES, 1979–2000;
DIRECTOR, HIRSHHORN MUSEUM AND SCULPTURE GARDEN, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, 2009–2013

“Maizels takes us on a fast-paced journey through the rise of contemporary art—offering counterintuitive insights, dispelling myths, and revealing the economic principles of a market that is ultimately more rational than it appears.”

—EVAN BEARD, EVP AT MASTERWORKS AND FORMER MANAGING DIRECTOR OF ART SERVICES AT BANK OF AMERICA

“Collecting the Now is the rare book that, because Maizels uses case studies, is able to provide the reader with both compelling details as well the big picture of how the worlds of money and art are intertwined in innovation in surprising ways.”

—MUKTI KHAIRE, GIRISH AND JAIDEV REDDY PROFESSOR OF PRACTICE, CORNELL TECH AND CORNELL SC JOHNSON COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

“Collecting the Now delivers an exciting behind-the-scenes view of art since the 1960s, unmasking the financial mechanisms that determine what art gets exhibited, written about, and, finally, lionized by art history.”

—JOSHUA SHANNON, PROFESSOR OF CONTEMPORARY ART HISTORY AND THEORY, UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

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On the Financial Side
of Postwar Art History

Michael Maizels

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Los Angeles (1974). Photograph by Gary Krueger. Courtesy of
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*To Róisín. Like your mom taught me,
may you not only ask “Why?” but “How?”*

All things float with equal specific gravity in the constantly moving stream of money.

—GEORG SIMMEL,

THE METROPOLIS AND MENTAL LIFE (1903)

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Debts of Gratitude

Those in the business world make a distinction between the left and right sides of a balance sheet. The left addresses the familiar territory of products and operations—revenue from sales, costs associated with production, profits remaining. The right side is a whole other matter. The right side of a balance sheet deals with a company's financing: How much debt is desirable to pay for current operations, or to expand them? How much is a share in the company actually worth? Those trained as cultural historians often have little preparation for attending to questions that arise from the right side of a balance sheet, and my journey into this fascinating, strange terrain would have been impossible without the help of numerous intellectual and professional guides.

I am indeed indebted to my mentors and colleagues at MIT, including faculty members Nick Montfort, Duncan Simester, and Scott Stern, as well as Sloan Fellows Tan Chui-Mae, Dan Mendelzon, Andrew Bilski, Ian Spector, and Adam Au (as well as the rest of our singular cohort). I owe particular thanks to Matthew Battles at the Harvard metaLAB for offering deep, incisive feedback on these pages, as well as metaLAB founder Jeffrey Schnapp for providing a capacious intellectual home for my research. I also wish to thank Tim Schneider and Greg Allen, two of the sharpest minds grappling not just with the direction, but with the meaning, of the market for contemporary art. I am additionally thankful to William Foster, whose expertise on the history of US tax law and patience with me were both invaluable. I also wish to acknowledge both Noah Horowitz and Claude Grunitzky for

providing important wisdom on the gap between the pasts and futures of patronage. Deepest thanks of all are due to my wife Elizabeth. It was the many-hour conversation about compensation philosophy on our first date that set this project in motion, and it is her ongoing support and inspiration that made possible its completion.

Opening Bell

By and large, historians of modern and contemporary art do not engage with what scholars of older art refer to as “patronage studies”—investigations of who paid for things and why those things were seen to be worth what they cost. That this should be the case at first appears odd. Given that collectors (or alternative funding systems) must subtend any significant area of practice, it seems essential to attend to the economic infrastructure behind the variegated terrain of postwar art. Indeed, artists themselves have frequently focused their work on the interplay between art systems and the financial worlds that fuel them. Michael Asher’s 1974 *Project at the Claire Copley Gallery* (which graces the cover of this book) illustrates this embarrassed codependence with the most concise of gestures—removing a gallery’s wall to reveal its business office in the back. Other artists, including Hans Haacke, Louise Lawler, and more recently Andrea Fraser, Carey Young, Brad Troemel, and American Artist, have built expansive *oeuvres* probing the coordinated flow of money and objects through a continuous economic space.¹

However, there are structural factors that have served to discourage art-historical investigation in this territory. The first and perhaps most obvious

1. Benjamin Buchloh, “Hans Haacke: Memory and Instrumental Reason,” in *Neo-avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 203–41; Douglas Crimp and Louise Lawler, *An Arrangement of Pictures* (New York: Perseus Distribution Services, 2000); Andrea Fraser and Jamie Stevens, eds., 2016—in *Museums, Money, and Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018); Carey Young and Martha Buskirk, *Subject to Contract* (Zurich: JRP Ringier and Migros Museum, 2013); Adrian Chen, “Brad Troemel, the Troll of Internet Art,” *New Yorker* (January 2017).

factor is the imbrication of the same players in both the high-dollar art market and the ostensible ivory-tower independence of academia. The number of mega-donors with a deep interest in art is finite, and as a result, many of the same patrons actively buy and sell in the commercial art world as well as support research in museums and universities. Thus, scholars have a marked disincentive that discourages them from attempting to prise apart the motivations (and potentially, unsavory machinations) of the donors underwriting the institutions on which the academic study of art depends. And though this conflicted interest could be said to have a chilling effect on artists as well as historians, scholars face additional hurdles when attempting to work in this territory. Artists are able to pick and choose their targets for interrogation with comparative freedom, but historians and other scholars often depend on access to specific archival materials. And accessing these materials in the unregulated, opaque world of the art market can be a frustrating exercise. Gallerists are much more willing to answer questions about their merchandise than their business practices, and collectors are often resistant to research inquiries *in toto*. This difficulty is reinforced at the institutional level, as museums typically bar outside historians from accessing any financial information concerning the objects in their collection. The frequent justification for censoring research materials is that, as financial records, they could hold no potential scholarly value.²

And for historians of recent art, there is yet another factor muddying the waters. Within the last several decades, the international art market has grown to such staggering proportions that it can be difficult to find the footing for an historical or critical analysis. In 2019 alone, galleries, private dealers, and auction houses collectively sold nearly \$65 billion dollars of art; the revenue generated by the global art market surpassed the GDP of Uruguay.³ A few years ago, the Gagosian Gallery (one of the world's top primary market dealers) is thought to have been the first to top \$1 billion in sales, while Sotheby's (the largest secondary-market auction house) generated just under \$5 billion.⁴ For the secondary market in particular, revenue is tightly con-

2. As quoted to me by Smithsonian Institution (5/2013) and MoMA (6/2018).

3. Art Basel and UBS, *The Art Market Annual Report 2019*, 15, 18; accessible online at <https://www.artbasel.com/about/initiatives/the-art-market>; "Uruguay GDP," <https://trading-economics.com/uruguay/gdp> (accessed 7/1/2018).

4. Sarah Douglas, "Larry Gagosian: Gagosian Gallery, and Personal Collection to Live On," *Art News* (February 2018), <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/larry-gagosian-gagosian-gallery-personal-collection-live-9772/>. Anny Shaw, "Global Auction Sales up 25%," *The Art*

strained to a small number of enormous transactions. In 2017, more than 2 percent of Sotheby's total revenue came from a single sale, tech entrepreneur Yusaku Maezawa's purchase of Jean Michel Basquiat's *Untitled* (1982) for \$110 million. Sotheby's main rival Christie's navigated an even more concentrated revenue stream: almost 10% of its nearly \$6 billion total sales volume came from the highly publicized sale of *Salvator Mundi*—the last Leonardo da Vinci painting thought to be held in private hands—to crown prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammed Ben Salman.⁵ And while the shakeup caused by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic is still of course underway, most signs post to yet-further consolidation in the industry.⁶

Although the heights of this financial landscape have to a certain extent repulsed art-historical analysis, the opening horizons of the global art world have attracted a new kind of scholarship, predicated on analyzing the art market as a freestanding object. In a field with both academic and applied dimensions, researchers investigate pricing structures and trends unique to the buying and selling of art objects.⁷ Much of this economic research focuses on Old Master objects—for which contemporary trends have limited possible meaning when applied to the study of their long-deceased creators—but even when economists and market specialists analyze the second half of the 20th century, scant attention is often paid to the historical interaction between the shifting vectors of aesthetic exploration and the changing parameters of the art market. The result is a field of analysis, focused on an art-producing system, that often precludes cultural or historical insight. This ascendant approach seems to confirm the typical art historian's deep, Adornian suspicions about the corrosive nature of capitalist exchange, and

Newspaper (January 2018), <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/global-auction-sales-up-25-in-2017> (accessed 7/1/2018). As a private entity, Gagosian Gallery is not required to disclose sales volume.

5. Anna Louie Sussman, "\$110 Million Basquiat Unseats Warhol as America's Most Expensive Artist at Sotheby's Sale," *Artsy*, <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-110-million-basquiat-unseats-warhol-americas-expensive-artist-sothebys-sale> (accessed 5/31/2018). Shane Harris, Kelly Crow, and Summer Said, "Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Identified as Buyer of Record-Breaking da Vinci," *Wall Street Journal* (December 7, 2017), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/saudi-arabias-crown-prince-identified-as-buyer-of-record-breaking-da-vinci-1512674099> (accessed 7/1/2018).

6. See for example Tim Schneider, "Why Gavin Brown's Move to Gladstone Suggests New York Galleries Are Worse Off Than We Thought," *Artnet* (July 27, 2020), <https://news.artnet.com/opinion/gavin-brown-gladstone-gray-market-1897239> (accessed 9/17/2020).

7. See for example work published in such venues as the *Journal of Cultural Economics*.

thus the discipline's gravitational pull away from the economic tissue of art-making becomes self-reinforcing.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY

However, if we consciously turn our attention to the evolving mechanisms through which the art world has funded itself, significant gains can be had. Namely, historians of modern and contemporary art have developed a well-articulated set of explanations as to why key evolutions took place: why Pop artists exploded the delimited parameters of aesthetic modernism (a rejection of the overwrought Abstract Expressionist gesture), why Land artists further strove against the object form itself (it was thought to be the last vestige of the above outmoded tradition), and why artists then returned to (neo-) traditional painting in the 1980s (postmodernism made belief in such historical progression untenable).

But the question remarkably elided by extant scholarship is "How?" How did conditions coalesce around Pop so that its artists entered museum collections, and scholarly analyses, at a pace unprecedented in the prior history of art? How, when seeking to transcend the delimited gallery object, were Land artists able to create monumental (and by extension, monumentally expensive) interventions in the extreme wilds of the Western deserts? And how did the esoteric objects of media art come eventually to scholarly attention in the sustained absence of academic interest or a private market? It is these "how" questions that become answerable by appeal to the financial conditions and funding mechanisms through which these works were created, advertised, distributed, and preserved. Indeed, my primary aim in writing this book has been to demonstrate the bidirectional influence of artistic and financial evolution: illuminating the ways in which important shifts in historical art practice were made possible by concomitant business-model innovation, and demonstrating how these funding mechanisms imprinted themselves on the resultant work. As the following pages detail, historical visibility within different aesthetic idioms comes about as result of different kinds of traction. Pop and neo-Expression artists were lauded after a series of sales, whereas Land artists needed to string together a series of successful commissions. Media artists became dependent on winning sequential grant applications.

To best explore how actors have shaped the course of art history in the late 20th century, *Collecting the Now* is organized into four case-study chap-

ters, each of which focuses on a single dealer and the ecosystem of artists and collectors in which they operated. This book does not provide an exhaustive or comprehensive treatment of the postwar art market, an exercise that risks collapsing back into an analysis of art sales detached from art history. Instead, *Collecting the Now* aims to provide a cross-section of key art-historical shifts, seen through the light of the diverse economic conditions that animated them. While our story begins and ends with two commercial spaces that each fed off of two very different fevered economic moments (the post-World War II boom and the 1980s stock bubble), the intervening chapters explore alternative models that sought to finance and distribute works of art that were either so obdurately massive or technologically esoteric that they defied the logic of the market. Uniting all four case studies was an intention to bring financial resources to bear on the production and dissemination of art in new ways—the path of least resistance carved between patronage and practice conditioned the work under consideration, and this path had comparatively little to do with the individual dealer’s desire to pursue profit. All four sought revenue through sales, only two succeeded, and yet all four left an indelible mark on the art history of their respective periods. The question then becomes how models beyond object sales can implant themselves in the historical record (an urgent question, given the present art world *system*) as well as to understand how these “nonprofit” structures condition the work that they foster.

Notably, *Collecting the Now* does not provide a radical rewriting of the canonical narratives of these art-historical episodes. Indeed, these narratives have become canonical at least in part because of the resources lavished on their constituents artists, and as this book aims to reveal how such resources have conditioned and constructed the canon, it hews fairly closely to a received set of movements. It should be noted, though, that this volume is nevertheless designed to expand awareness of the contribution of female dealers—half of its case studies focus on spaces run by women. Virginia Dwan and Mary Boone both made enormous contributions through their respective galleries, and Boone’s space is particularly important for thinking through the complex history of feminism. The rapid growth of Boone’s gallery—connected as it was to the heady stock market—must be understood in connection with the contemporaneous rise of women on Wall Street. This connection makes it all the more clear that Boone’s support of artists such as Sherrie Levine and Barbara Kruger calls for revisiting the anticapitalist orientation purported to be central to radical feminist art of the 1980s.

Given that this book is structured as a series of case studies—with a plethora of potential objects of inquiry from which to choose—it is important to here explain why certain things got put in while others were left out. First, one should note that this book is framed almost completely from an American perspective. This need not have been the case. As chapter 1 describes, Leo Castelli's system was predicated on European cross-validation for his American stable, and I could easily have opened the rest of the volume to probing the international growth of the model pioneered by his gallery. Indeed, scholars and curators including Alexander Alberro, Sophie Richard, and Okwui Enwezor have already carried out excellent investigations in this territory.⁸

However, *Collecting the Now* focuses on the narrower American context to more clearly illustrate changes taking place over time—a back-and-forth rhythm of artistic and economic opportunities that gave rise to what is now the history of postwar art. And, seen in the more narrowly cast American context, this rhythm becomes quite clear. Through a mixture of savvy, family connections, luck, and willingness to wade into legal gray areas, Leo Castelli was able to make a provocative opening move—the creation of a self-funding world of American contemporary art. The “neo-Dada” and Pop shown in his gallery reflected a confluence of art historical and economic factors: the rejection of the insular abstraction of New York School painting and a set of financial imperatives, explained in the chapter, to produce work in multiply iterated series. Thus, to subtend a stylistic revolt in the other direction—the quixotic, singular interventions of Land Art—one would need to find a Virginia Dwan, a dedicated backer with vast financial resources who could serve as both as collector and dealer for objects impossible to move.⁹

Dwan's claiming of a place far outside of the commercial realm forms a kind of mirror image for media art in the 1970s, which held similarly uto-

8. Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 152–211. Sophie Richard, *Unconcealed, the International Network of Conceptual Artists 1967–77: Dealers, Exhibitions and Public Collections* (London: Ridinghouse, 2009). Okwui Enwezor et al., *Postwar: Art Between the Pacific and the Atlantic, 1945–1965* (Munich: Haus der Kunst, 2016).

9. Periodizing or speciating terms such as “Land,” “Pop,” and “Conceptual” are almost always subject to ongoing contestation. For the purposes of the present study, terms are capitalized as a way to point to an ostensible unity of practice ascribed to the participating makers and objects, unity essential for the subsequent historicization and market validation of the work under a ready rubric. However, pressure is put on select terms and rubrics overtly authored by historical actors in this study, particularly “neo-Dada” (as discussed in chapter 1, probably offered by Castelli) and “Earthworks” (coined by Robert Smithson and adopted by Virginia Dwan).

pian tendencies but was premised on opposing axioms. Whereas Land artists addressed themselves to the scope of world's ancient Wonders—with monuments built far out into the wilderness—media artists were an inherently urban and technological lot, producing hand-built, state-of-the-art constructions that were intended to help bring about a future rather than return to a past. This conceptual shift again required a new funding model—one that was in large part created by Howard Wise—which connected a disparate community of avant-garde artists to deep-pocketed public-interest grant-makers such as the NEA and the Rockefeller Foundation. And as the US economy shook off the economic doldrums of the 1970s, an opportunity was created to develop an art market that would grow with the increasingly financialized global economy. Indeed, the Mary Boone Gallery was animated by funds as well as ideas that originated on Wall Street, and her program would need a kind of art that could be seen to bear out attendant speculation. It should come as no surprise, then, that Boone became famous for supporting a return to a heroically scaled painting, one whose theory of authorship emphasized unique, stormy visionaries expressing themselves through their bravura brushwork.

Thus, as this volume is focused on the American market to more fully attend to the call and response between the art world and the art market, it is additionally worth explaining why this book begins with Leo Castelli's support of neo-Dada and Pop. It was, as the standard story goes, the prior generation of New York School painters who pushed America to the art-historical forefront. However, numerous scholars have been working to nuance this story, revealing how the transfer of cultural capital from war-torn Europe to an ascendant America was a rocky and uneven process. Serge Guilbaut's iconic *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*—an important model for the following pages—is particularly thorough on this point. In a manner parallel with this book, Guilbaut argues that a powerful group of incentives fostered the creation of an American vector of avant-garde modernism, one that would give America a cultural seriousness commensurate with its newfound military and economic might.¹⁰ But this geopolitical imperative did not bring with it a robust financial infrastructure.¹¹ Gallery records reveal that Betty Parsons, Jackson Pollock's primary dealer during the mid-1950s, sold a handful of paintings a year, each typically priced at around \$5,000.

10. Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 165–94.

11. Titia Hulst, "The Leo Castelli Gallery," *Archives of American Art Journal* 46, nos. 3/4 (2007): 16.

After the 50 percent gallery cut, he would take home under \$10,000. Fast-forward only a few years to 1963, when Leo Castelli was writing to assuage Jasper Johns's nervous realtor that the artist realized an annual income of \$30,000, or over \$200,000 in 2018-adjusted dollars.¹² It was, in fact, largely through the activities of Castelli that the American art market developed the self-sustaining momentum needed to support, as well as shape, the subsequent course of art history.

Similarly, it is worth saying a word about why this book ends where and when it does. Notably, with the exception of the conclusion, this volume does not tread into the frenzied global market of today, neither up to nor including the NFT mania of 2021. While the pre-crypto version of this topic has been well rehearsed in the contemporary literature—see recent works by Pamela Lee, Georgina Adam, Olav Velthuis, and others—this pressing presentism has rendered it difficult to incisively analyze the historical importance of recent developments. Moreover, “recent developments” have convincingly demonstrated the folly of extrapolating future performance from the near past; the frenzied distillation of art *cum* experience (demonstrable in the dominance of international mega-fairs and the rise of Instagram-ready immersive techno-theaters) came to a crashing halt with the lockdowns of early 2020. While nearly everyone agrees that the new magnitude and interconnectedness of the international art market will shape the future of art history, one can only speculate about which courses this history will take. As such, this book concludes with the art-world crash of the 1990s, one that, at the time, was often blamed on the business tactics promulgated by Boone. This contraction forms a kind of interlude between the truly global market of the 21st century and the ground broken by Castelli in the wake of World War II. It is this arc that is traced in the following pages.

CHAPTER PREVIEWS

The first chapter, “Taxing the System,” analyzes the impact of Leo Castelli, a key gallerist and dealer in the Pop Art world, focusing on how innovations in the economics of his program catalyzed far-reaching changes in the nature of artistic production. Castelli not only drastically increased the marketing and promotion campaign for his stable, but he made other strategic shifts

12. Jackson Pollock Sales Invoices, Betty Parsons Gallery Files; Jasper Johns artist's correspondence, Leo Castelli Gallery Files; both from Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

that would have important ramifications for the artists and the art he was selling. For example, he popularized the now-common practice of paying his artists a regular stipend—which had the effect of freeing them from the need to make “one big sale” and thus allowed them to produce more heterogeneous work.

This shift illustrates the importance of attending to questions on the right side of balance sheet. By paying salaries, Castelli assumed all, rather than half, of the risk of unsold work, and thus would need a regular infusion of outside cash (i.e., a working capital loan) to smooth out the ups and downs of the sales cycle. This need for working capital, which coincided with a comparative profusion of works, coalesced with Castelli’s observation of a little-noticed laxity in the enforcement of regulations governing how collectors appraise works they donate to museums. This chapter details a remarkable, newly discovered tax-avoidance mechanism pioneered by Castelli and patron/creditor Robert Scull, a mechanism that relied on exaggerated appraisals for objects donated to art museums. A single, well-documented implementation of this mechanism runs in excess in of \$1,000,000 in 2018-adjusted dollars. Rising prices, uneven enforcement, and spurious appraisals spurred a wave of collecting and gifting to museums, helping to generate a demand for work that could best be met by working in the signature Pop modality of the multiple.

The second chapter, “Marketplace of Ideas,” focuses on the impact of Virginia Dwan, a collector and dealer who became the most important source of funding for the massive undertakings that came to define Land Art. Through her connection with Castelli, Dwan became an important West Coast outpost for a new kind of art that privileged concept over contingent material realization. Dwan’s advocacy of such idea-based work—which encompassed support for artists including Yves Klein, Sol LeWitt, and Mel Bochner—reached its zenith in the financial backing she provided for monumental works situated in the landscape. Drawing on vast personal resources derived from her position as an heir to the 3M fortune, Dwan financed the construction of Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty*, Michael Heizer’s *Double Negative*, and Walter de Maria’s *Lightning Field*, among many others.

In so doing, Dwan created almost single-handedly a small but powerful niche market for monumental works that could not exist within a traditionally conceived commercial gallery. Dwan created something like an elite marketplace of ideas—in which the ownership of *Double Negative* could change hands, even if the object could never physically be moved. But Dwan’s importance to the world of Land Art was not limited to her role as a funder. As the party who commissioned them, Dwan had the duty to

preserve (and preserve access to) works such as *Spiral Jetty* and *Double Negative*, and she cultivated a new network of patrons and foundations to protect these constructions. Through collaborations with the DIA Foundation—an endowed nonprofit set up to support monumental artworks that had been directly inspired by Dwan’s stable—and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Dwan stewarded a seemingly impossible set of wilderness interventions into well-studied sites of art pilgrimage in the 21st century.

The third chapter, “Circuits of Exchange,” examines the impact of Howard Wise, founder of the first New York gallery to focus on electronic art. Though the Howard Wise Gallery was a short-lived experiment, its demise led Wise to create a new kind of organization that would help to both create and distribute new kinds of technology-based works of art. Founded in 1970, Wise’s Electronic Arts Intermix—and the related Artists’ Videotape Distribution Service—has since become the preeminent channel through which the video work of artists including Nam June Paik, Bruce Nauman, John Baldesarri, and Dara Birnbaum have come to historical and curatorial attention. Wise’s EAI was created as a unique kind of organization, one dedicated to promoting and distributing, rather than buying and selling, work by artists.

Indeed, Wise’s paradigm-shifting organization both produced and was produced by the radically technological work for which it sought to advocate. Wise not only created a network through which esoteric work could enter into the power halls of the art world, but he aimed to open access to the technology itself. He built subsidized editing and postproduction facilities, which offered low-cost video services and training for interested artists. He created lasting relationships with grant-making organizations and forged distribution channels for video art—both within the elite confines of the museum and in the more broad-minded space of public television broadcasts. Wise’s cultivation of these funds, communities, and audiences provided a habitat for a mode of working that was, until recently, largely dismissed by the power centers of the art world.

The fourth chapter returns to the commercial market, exploring how Mary Boone both built and fed off of an historic bubble in the prices for contemporary art, particularly the neo-Expressionist canvases of painters such as Julian Schnabel, Eric Fischl, and Jean-Michel Basquiat. Dubbed “the Queen of Soho” during the peak of her influence, she charted an unprecedented rise in the prices commanded by the artists she represented. In so doing, she changed long-standing precedents about the relationship between the primary and secondary art markets, for example working closely with Sotheby’s

on a headline auction for a painting that was only four years old. The sale, in which the work was sold for nearly thirty times its original price, touched off a wave of speculative buying, one that Boone helped to further perpetuate.

This speculation—which both echoed and drew from the larger stock bubble of the 1980s—was given increasing momentum by innovations on the economic side. Boone introduced the practice of selling art “futures”—paintings delivered at a later date and priced to encourage speculation on their emergent value. This innovation resonated with strategies fueling the synchronous growth on Wall Street, strategies deeply dependent on a new set of financial futures markets. And Boone’s tactics were amplified by other changes introduced by Sotheby’s new chairman, Alfred Taubman, who imported the technique of margin buying from the financial services industry. The result was a model for patronage that could keep pace with—and draw its energy directly from—the global financial markets. And while the focus remains on Boone’s involvement in the meteoric rise and spectacular crash of “the return to painting,” this chapter explores the counter-intuitive affiliation between the Mary Boone Gallery and the icons of radical feminist critique, including Barbara Kruger and Sherrie Levine.

Finally, *Collecting the Now* concludes with a shorter case study of a truly contemporary artist whose work challenges the unidirectional flow of influence—from economic conditions to art practice—presumed by the preceding four chapters. Artist and community activist Theaster Gates has pioneered a unique approach to the relationship between a creator and a collector base, developing a relational practice centered on revitalizing disadvantaged African American communities in the Midwest. In Gates’s model, the sale of individual objects is reinvested to fund subsequent community-based work, generating an opportunity for collectors to invest not only in the career of an artist but also in the vitality of living networks. Indeed, Gates’s work provides a model in which an artist aims for a desired result of economic exchange—in this case, community development—and then designs a practice around achieving this end.

VALUE AND IMPLICATIONS

While my primary aim in writing this book has been to offer an open examination of how the narratives of the history of art have both produced and been produced by economic considerations, it is appropriate here to say a word about the two key takeaways that emerge from these pages. First, this

analysis provides an important reminder of the history-altering potential of the actions of single individuals. The discipline of art history has rightly endeavored to shed its fixation with individual artists conceived in the role of isolated geniuses, emphasizing in its place the impact of broad historical trends and forces. For example, Pop Art is often situated as a local reaction against modernist painting, one that capitalized on the rise of advertising imagery in the culture at large. While capturing the gist of the work, this interpretive lens misses the centrality of a figure such as Castelli, who built a collecting base unlike anything that had ever been achieved for a living American artist. Castelli did not select its imagery, but it was largely through his activities that the particular formulation of Pop Art succeeded Abstract Expressionism in the art-historical canon. Indeed, the importance of the financial hub to a creator network is magnified outside of the commercial mode. Lifelines of access to viewers and venues, interpretative stakeholders, institutional partners, and upstream funding sources must all be created *de novo*. Without Dwan or Wise, the innovations of Land or video art might simply never have taken place.

The second insight concerns the ways in which economic and aesthetic ecosystems feed into one another. A widespread belief among art historians is that capital's role in culture is essentially one of homogenization: money flattens essential differences between times and places, making all things interchangeable with one another. While the recent formulation of this attitude was popularized by figures such as Benjamin Buchloh and Fredric Jameson, its origins can be traced much earlier. The application of this Marxian line of thinking to the products of culture is part of a storied intellectual tradition working back through the writings of Althusser, Lukács, Gramsci, Adorno, and Georg Simmel, whose scathing indictment of the hollowing effect of global finance is quoted in the book's opening epigraph. All things, as Simmel put it, "float with equal specific gravity" in the ever-flowing "stream of money."

While the water may be ubiquitous, this book aims to demonstrate that the intersection of aesthetic and economic vectors more closely resembles the conflicting currents of a stormy ocean than the smooth, directional flow of a river. Namely, these multiply-determined interactions generate profusion and difference rather than endless sameness. Castelli's gallery model did not merely showcase changes already taking place within the logic of art history; he actively worked to frame these changes in the spirit of broader socioeconomic transformation. His was a model of advertising—in which many more kinds of things could be sold to new buyers interested in art objects

that reflected an idealized version of their own self-image. While Castelli focused on broadening the base of the market, Mary Boone sought to raise its peak. Different than the Pop gallery, which moved away from the singular masterwork in favor of the language of the multiple, Boone's system entailed a return to the heroically scaled unique object, one that would (for a short time at least) be able to bear the weight of intensive financial speculation. Dwan and Wise created financial architectures that, while similar in their eschewing of profit motives, could not have been more different. Massive mineral dislocations and exploratory screen-based work (documentable with but not reducible to videotape) were each enabled by profoundly divergent ecosystems of institutions and resources.

No doubt, the above evolutions are in part due to the internal rhythms of art-historical development: a move toward the quotidian objects of a forward-looking cultural moment, the adaptation of new technologies of production and distribution, and then a return to an older model of working that incorporates conceptual lessons from its immediate antecedents. But yet, an essential catalyst for these shifts must undoubtedly be contemporaneous economic changes, both within and beyond the art world. As Clement Greenberg wrote almost eighty years ago, the avant-garde has "always remained attached" to the society that produced it by connection through an "umbilical cord of gold."¹³ While Greenberg was writing against the danger of artists reigning in their explorations to please conservative backers, his point is more incisive as an historical insight. Namely, the way an isolated group of artist-producers is connected to a supporting social and economic context matters a great deal for how these worlds figure each other. Differing financial parameters condition different art histories—from the iterated profusion of Pop incentivized by Castelli's leveraging of the tax code to the ascendance of media art made possible by Wise's coordination with grant-making organizations. Indeed, as the following pages argue, one cannot understand the mechanisms or the implications of artistic change without attending to the concomitant evolution of the ways in which works of art are financed and distributed.

13. Clement Greenberg, "Avant Garde and Kitsch," in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 1, ed. John O'Brien (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 11.

1 ♦ Taxing the System

Leo Castelli Makes a Market

One has an interest in giving them away so as to be able to possess yet other objects . . . that, in their turn, can be transformed again into money.

—MARCEL MAUSS, 1925

The ubiquity and power of the current market for the work of living artists masks its inherent strangeness. How do pieces of what is now called “ultra-contemporary” art accrue the prestige and valuation typically reserved for long-deceased Old Masters or ancient artifacts? How can one, to choose a recently vivid example, price and sell a six-figure banana? The soil for this strange fruit has been prepared over many decades, and depends in turn on seemingly ancient developments from the prior century: the rise of experimental modernism in Paris, the invention of media celebrity in Hollywood, and the reprojection of US power onto the European landscape in the wake of World War II.¹ Once the logic of the system got going—generation

1. Important historiographic touchstones for this work include Thomas Crow, *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Benjamin Buchloh (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000); Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). Also informing this research are more recent contributions, such as Georgina Adam, *Big Bucks: The Explosion of the Art Market in the 21st Century* (London: Ashgate, 2014); Noah Horowitz, *The Art of the Deal: Contemporary Art in a Global Financial Market* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); and Titia Hulst, ed., *A History of the Western Art Market* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017).



Leo Castelli and others at dinner at the Venice Biennale (1964). (Image courtesy Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.)

after generation of experimental makers dubbed the next intermediate heirs to the canonized masters of the Renaissance—it quickly began to build a momentum all its own. This chapter dives into a particular case study at a pivotal moment in this history, one that reveals in granular detail *how* a seminal circuit of artists, patrons, and critic-scholars coalesced around the Leo Castelli Gallery in the late 1950s. The answer to how Castelli was able to unlock monetary patronage and academic lionization turns on an audacious cross-manipulation of both sets of actors, and reveals uncomfortable truths about how power brokers create value both within and beyond the art world.²

2. Findings related to Castelli's tax-scheme collusion with Robert Scull were previously published in two places. In the summer of 2019, the author collaborated with tax-law expert William Foster to publish an extended note in the *Columbia Journal of Law and the Arts*, a leading law journal addressing financial and legal issues in the creative arts. These findings were then built on by Gregory Allen in a feature article published in *Art News* in November 2019. I am grateful to both Foster and Allen for their contributions to this important research and for their feedback on the below pages.

Castelli was, in his own day, a radically polarizing figure. To his admirers, he seemed an American incarnation of Ambroise Vollard, the dealer whose farsighted support of Cézanne and Picasso had done much to secure the emergence of modern art in France at the turn of the 20th century. To his detractors, he was a “Metternich of art”: a ruthlessly cold pragmatist, and possible charlatan, whose business was rather arbitrarily chosen to be within the art world.³ He was, according to those who knew him best, a strange mixture of shrewd observer, tireless salesman, and mistake-prone business amateur. The Castelli Gallery was, by all measures, the most lucrative gallery of its time, and yet, as its primary accountant described it, it was run as “a giant shoestring operation.”⁴ Big-ticket sales, thin margins, haphazard arrangements, and occasionally blind faith in art collectively yield a complicated picture of a man who was, in some sense, almost single-handedly responsible for the creation of the modern incarnation of the art world.

A pre–World War II Italian-Jewish émigré, Castelli had returned from fighting in the American army to manage his father-in-law’s clothing factory in Queens. But as his relationship with his wife Ileana—who would soon emerge as an independent ally and powerful dealer in her own right—began to deteriorate, Castelli found himself dedicating increasing time and emotional energy to the ongoing florescence of contemporary American painting. But in the early 1950s, Castelli lacked a place to stand in this world. As small-time dealer of secondhand European works and a self-taught connoisseur of the American avant-garde, his attempts to integrate himself into the orbit of the New York School met with little success. The dynamic was shifting as he launched his own gallery in early 1957. Not content with the small profile and willful provincialism of the extant American galleries, Castelli built himself into a notorious, and notoriously successful, promoter: commissioning laudatory articles for his stable from esteemed scholars, and working his personal contact with MoMA director Alfred Barr to push museum acquisitions of his artists at unprecedentedly early moments in their careers. These paradigm-shifting acquisitions only created more interest in the work he was promoting, and therefore more pressure from the work’s collectors to see their wisdom confirmed on museum walls in real time.

3. Annie Cohen-Solal, *Leo and His Circle: The Life of Leo Castelli* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), xvii. Though often problematic in its hagiographic framework, Cohen-Solal’s biography of Castelli remains the most comprehensive source on his activities. See also Alice Goldfarb Marquis, *Pop Revolution*, 9. The “Metternich” comes to the fore in Jed Perl’s response to Cohen-Solal. See Jed Perl, *Magicians and Charlatans* (New York: Eakins Press Foundation, 2012), 150.

4. Calvin Tomkins, “A Good Eye and a Good Ear,” *New Yorker* (May 26, 1980), 40.

Castelli not only drastically increased the marketing and promotion campaign for his gallery, but he also made other strategic shifts that would have important ramifications for the artists and the art he was selling. He began the practice, expected during the grand old days of European aristocratic patronage but unheard of in the market-driven US, of paying his artists a regular stipend rather than asking them to work off of commissions.⁵ This change in funding structure had the effect of freeing them from the need to make “one big sale” and allowed them to produce more heterogeneous work. Castelli was then able to take advantage of this profusion by aggressively exploiting an underdeveloped tax-enforcement regime in which collectors would deduct a work’s appraised value, rather than its sale price, from their taxes. This approach created a powerful incentive to buy and then donate works, such as newly esteemed Johns and Rauschenberg objects, whose value was increasing at a rate never seen in the history of the art market. Such “appraised increases”—which include at least one astonishing example of overt fraud—were guaranteed either by interested appraisers or by museum staff themselves. A circle of self-reinforcing incentives emerged in which dealers sold works, museums received objects, and patrons pocketed huge sums of money through tax savings. Unsurprisingly, this feed-forward system catalyzed an unprecedented wave of collecting and gifting to museums, which in turn helped to solidify Castelli’s vision as the next stage of an unfolding art history.

Importantly, the financial and art-historical vectors of this coup are inherently bound up in one another. Castelli’s gallery model did not merely showcase changes already taking place within the logic of art history; he actively worked to frame these changes in the spirit of the broader economic culture. Castelli’s was a model of advertising—in which more kinds could be sold to new buyers interested in art objects that reflected an idealized version of their self-image. This shift—to the terrain of advertising as both the logic of the market around Pop as well as the contents within it—figures as part of a larger transference of cultural and economic capital from Europe to America in the wake of World War II. Castelli was a pivotal figure in the creation of the infrastructure that would make possible this transference: the tissue of interconnections among curators, scholars, patrons, and gallery spaces that was needed to support an American ascendance in the world of contemporary art. Indeed, as a European expatriate, Castelli actively worked

5. Tomkins, “A Good Eye and a Good Ear,” 61.

to frame the artists he showed as bearing out the next developmental phase of the problems and questions posed by European modernism.

It is this last point that is perhaps most significant for understanding the collective impact of the dealers who comprise case studies in this book. Like most gallerists, Castelli was at pains to disavow his status as a “tastemaker”; he insisted that he was a neutral, artist-minded advocate for work in which he believed. He worried about the impression that he had become an arbiter or, even worse, an author, of the lineage of historical successions. Whatever his intentions, the following pages argue that these worries were well founded. As the eminent Thomas Crow put it, Castelli had “as great a part to play” in the unfolding of postwar American art “as most of the artists who figure in it.”⁶ It is not merely that his gallery gave a prominent platform to the artists who would succeed the New York School. Rather, I hope to make a stronger claim: that the aesthetic, intellectual, institutional, and financial nature of this succession was created in large part by Castelli’s actions.

SETTING UP SHOP

To understand the beginnings of Castelli’s activities in New York, it is essential to attend to how these activities were intertwined with threads dangling from his former life in Europe. Castelli had in fact been co-running a gallery in Paris—focused mostly on Surrealist work alongside fine furniture—with the interior designer and antique dealer René Drouin. Though the gallery soon folded as the city’s intellectuals fled the oncoming Nazi advance, Drouin and Castelli remained in contact, and Drouin actually gave Castelli his first significant commercial opportunity in America. Drouin had come into contact with Nina Kandinsky, the widow of the great painter Wassily, who had a great volume of work she wished to dispose of on the private market. The mercurial Nina proved too much of a burden for both Drouin and Castelli; the estate sale left the rancorous parties accusing each other of bad faith. Nevertheless, it had provided Castelli with an introduction into the world of the American art market, and just as importantly, with a visibly important precedent for his forthcoming activities as a dealer in “modern masters.”⁷

6. Tom Crow, *Rise of the Sixties* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 185.

7. Tomkins, *Off the Wall*, 47, and Cohen-Solal, *Leo and His Circle*, 185–89. See also Michèle

These activities were to take some years to solidify in form. Yearning for a way into the art world, Castelli set about attempting to ingratiate himself with the insider crowd. Hoping to gain access to the upper echelons of MoMA, he donated an Arshile Gorky drawing to the museum, but director Alfred Barr remained frustratingly aloof. Sensing that he needed education and entrée beyond what the museum's public galleries could provide, he set out to befriend the leading critics of his day, including Clement Greenberg, Leo Steinberg, and Thomas Hess.⁸ Through Greenberg, as well as through the patron Peggy Guggenheim, Castelli came to meet the leading figures of the burgeoning world of American abstract painting.⁹ It was Greenberg, Castelli claimed, who encouraged him to become a dealer.¹⁰

By 1950, Castelli was talking Sidney Janis—one of the leading American dealers showing European Surrealism—into mounting an exhibition that would juxtapose rising American painters with their European counterparts: the Pollock and de Kooning world meets the postwar Informel. One of the first formal interactions between Castelli and the New York School painters, the project met with a mixed reaction from the artists whom he dearly hoped to impress. “While they didn’t know what to make of me,” he explained to his biographer, “I had tremendous admiration for them.”¹¹ Despite the resistance he met as an intellectually minded European connoisseur from the notoriously coarse Irascibles, Castelli persisted in his efforts to insert himself into their orbit. The following year, he paid for the exhibition space and advertising for the now iconic 9th Street Exhibition, and was rewarded for his efforts by the attention paid to it by Alfred Barr, who, Castelli was to proudly claim, took home photographs of the work with Castelli’s notes on the back.¹²

In the years following that show, Castelli grew familiar with the social world of the New York School. Though he still lacked a formal role, Castelli gradually rose in importance within this tight-knit world: introducing col-

C. Cone, “First Steps,” *Artnet*, July 21, 2010, <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/cone/leo-castelli-surrealist-design7-21-10.asp> (accessed 11/12/17).

8. Paul Cummings, “Interview with Leo Castelli,” Archives of American Art Oral History Project, conducted May 14, 1969/June 8, 1973, accessible online at <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-leo-castelli-123701> (accessed 11/12/17).

9. Barbara Rose, “Interview with Leo Castelli,” Archives of American Art Oral History Project, conducted July 1969, accessible online at <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-leo-castelli-11784> (accessed 11/12/17).

10. Cohen-Solal, *Leo and His Circle*, 177.

11. Quoted in Cohen-Solal, *Leo and His Circle*, 209.

12. Tomkins, 51. See also Cohen-Solal, *Leo and His Circle*, 243–44.

lectors and curators to new artists, guiding the artists themselves toward gallery representation, and mediating between contentious rivals, including the notoriously temperamental Pollock and the often-jealous de Kooning. He persistently tried to stake out a gallery that would straddle the European and American worlds, but after failing to convince either Barr or Janis to serve as a needed ally in the project, he was forced to consider achieving this end through other means. Perhaps it was only a matter of time before the Castelli home itself became the site of an exhibition conceived on this premise. “One thing I did, that I think was done for the first time,” he explained to an interviewer in 1970, “was mixing so-called European masters with American masters. I think that nobody had done it before.”¹³ The exhibition, which took place in Castelli’s living room and continued into his recently vacated daughter’s bedroom, juxtaposed European heavyweights such as Piet Mondrian and older-generation American painters such as Marsden Hartley with the work of the New York School.

And while, as the newly launched gallery gained traction, Castelli would continue show high American abstraction, he was nevertheless keenly aware that his endeavor would not be best served by becoming too closely identified with what had already become a reigning orthodoxy. He explained his early thinking about the trajectory that his future gallery program would take to the critic Barbara Rose in 1969, and it is worth quoting him at length on this point:

Frankly I did not have many Abstract Expressionists because I was very ambitious and only the best would do. And the best was at Janis. I still believed very strongly in de Kooning and Pollock and the others. One of the reasons—one of the reasons—not all of them, was that I would have to take second best and I didn’t feel like doing that. So I was biding my time . . . and trying to see what would come up where I could function ambitiously and on my own without following a movement.¹⁴

In this passage one sees Castelli’s “ambition”—his desire to leave a mark by advocating for a kind of art that lacked widespread recognition, but that through his activities would come to occupy a prominent place in the discourse of the art world.

13. Cummings, “Interview with Leo Castelli.”

14. Rose, “Interview with Leo Castelli.”

But perhaps the key phrase of Castelli's here is, "without following a movement." This seeming emphasis on singularity belies the need for historicity that Castelli absorbed from his mentors Greenberg and Barr. These figures had each built an impressive edifice—one intellectual, the other institutional—which worked to situate the heterogeneous explorations of ongoing artistic practice as the leading edge of an unfolding, but nevertheless implicitly unified, history. For Barr and Greenberg, Pollock and his contemporaries were both answering and posing questions that had been left to them by the European masters of modernism, who were in turn responding to the challenges laid down by the Impressionist solutions to the painting problems they themselves inherited—through an iterated process—back to the Old Masters of the Renaissance. For a dealer oriented to the future rather than the past, the question was of course, what would come next? As Castelli himself explained, "I felt that something else had to happen" in the vacuum left by the waning of Abstract Expressionism. "I tried deliberately to detect that other thing." And then, in his words, he "stumbled upon Rauschenberg and Johns."¹⁵

NEW DIRECTIONS/NEO-DADA

Castelli had in fact happened on the first of this pair back in 1951 through his participation in the artist-driven 9th Street Exhibition he had helped to fund.¹⁶ And as he was beginning chart a course for his new gallery in 1957, he put together a rough grouping of artists under the loose heading "New Directions," which included several alumni from the 9th Street Exhibition, including Rauschenberg as well as the abstract painters Friedel Dzubas and Alfred Leslie. In the lead-up to the show, which took place in May 1957, Castelli first saw Jasper Johns's work at *Artists of the New School: Second Generation* at the Jewish Museum. Castelli recalls being blown away by what he saw: "I came across that green painting [*Green Target*, 1955] and it made a tremendous impression on me right away. I looked at the name. The name didn't mean anything to me. It seemed almost like an invented name—Jasper Johns."¹⁷ According to a much-rehearsed anecdote, he was subsequently visiting with Rauschenberg at the latter's studio and through

15. Milton Esterow, "Conversation: Leo Castelli. Who Knows When Another Epiphany Will Occur?" *Artnews* 90, no. 4 (April 1991): 73–77.

16. Cummings, "Interview with Leo Castelli."

17. Cummings, "Interview with Leo Castelli."

blind chance learned that Johns had a studio downstairs. He interrupted his ongoing visit with Rauschenberg, insisting that he go see Johns's studio firsthand. His level of enthusiasm evidently unabated, Castelli offered Johns an opportunity to join his coalescing roster on the spot.

While in subsequent interviews Castelli waxed poetic about "all those great masterpieces" he saw in Johns's studio, it is less immediately apparent what about these paintings and collages so fired his imagination. As has been extensively documented elsewhere, Johns and Rauschenberg had been living an isolating existence on the margins of the art scene—both their unusual, object-collage work and their romantic involvement with one another set them apart from the rigorously abstract and thoroughly macho circle of the dominant New York School.¹⁸ But something did indeed convince Castelli of the potential he saw in Johns's studio, potential he recalled a decade later as "absolutely a million dollars' worth of paintings" simply sitting among the racks.¹⁹ This characterization, though it was given more than a decade after the fact, is quite striking. Considering that the works of a well-established painter like Pollock might sell for \$5,000, Castelli's comment teases the price-tag gamesmanship that he would, over the next few years, develop into an art form all its own.

After his fateful studio visit, Castelli not only created room for Johns in the gallery's "New Work" group exhibition, but delayed Robert Rauschenberg's first solo exhibition by several months to give his slot over to Johns. While we will have more to say about Johns's solo debut in a moment, an important piece of the coalescing puzzle of value creation first comes into focus in "New Work." Though the exhibition did not make a particularly deep impression on critics, it received one review that, in hindsight, appears remarkably important. The young critic Robert Rosenblum, who had earned his PhD the preceding year from NYU, penned a short, highly positive review in *Arts*, which opened with praise of Johns's *Flag* (1954–55). Extolling the virtues of a reproduction of a flag that had made undecidable the poles of heterodoxy and homage, the prolix Rosenblum insisted that work evidenced "a vital neo-Dada spirit." The term here is significant insofar as it positioned Johns (and would soon position Rauschenberg and others) as an historical heir to an important European tradition as well as an alternative to the dogmatically areferential world of Greenbergian abstraction.²⁰

18. Jonathan D. Katz and David C. Ward, *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* (Washington, DC: National Portrait Gallery/ Smithsonian Institution, 2012), 34–44.

19. Cummings, "Interview with Leo Castelli."

20. Robert Rosenblum, "Castelli Group," *Arts* (May 1957): 53.

As historians of this period are well aware, Rosenblum would become a key interpretative ally for both Castelli and Johns. He would go on to write, among other positive exhibition reviews, an effusively praiseful essay for Johns's first solo museum show at the Columbia Museum of Art (SC) in 1960, the colophon for an important print portfolio in 1963, and a series of lengthy articles now anthologized in his *On American Art* (1999). What is less well known is that, dating back to the very beginning, he was also a collector of Johns's work. Gallery records show that, at least by November 1960, Rosenblum owned Johns's *Flag on Orange Field II* (1958), which at the time was valued at \$3,000. When Rosenblum lent the same picture to the Jewish Museum for Johns's first major retrospective in New York, the painting had, according to Castelli's appraisals, tripled in value. And the painting kept on rising. Another appraisal, prepared again by Castelli and sent directly to Rosenblum's faculty offices at NYU in April 1967, shows the painting valued at \$20,000, the centerpiece of a total Johns collection estimated at \$32,000, or about \$250,000 in today's dollars.²¹

But bracketing aside the financial motives momentarily, the power of the phrase "neo-Dada" would become clear in the wake of Johns's first solo show at Castelli Gallery, a show that has been rightly considered a watershed exhibition. As *New Yorker* critic Calvin Tomkins recently put it, "Jasper Johns' first one man show at Castelli hit the art world like a meteor."²² The exhibition, which landed Johns on the cover of *Art News*, sold out all but two of his works to collectors, including David Rockefeller, Robert Scull, Burton Tremaine, Phillip Johnson, and Alfred Barr (purchasing on behalf of MoMA).²³ Given its historical significance, it is important to unpack the ways in which Castelli calibrated the interpretive frame around Johns's debut exhibition. Importantly, Tom Hess, the leading editor for *Art News*, came to see the exhibition before it opened. In interviews, Castelli was always notably coy about how this exactly transpired. When asked by Paul Cummings in 1969 how the exhibition gained so much traction with *Art News* as quickly as it did, Castelli responded,

I don't know. Tom Hess came. Again, I can tell you that episode. That was even before the show went up. The paintings were around but

21. Robert Rosenblum Correspondence, Leo Castelli Gallery Files, Archives of American Art. Reproduction images of gallery ledgers available on request.

22. Calvin Tomkins, *Off the Wall: A Portrait of Robert Rauschenberg* (New York: Deckled Edge, 2005), 131.

23. Jasper John Correspondence, Leo Castelli Gallery Files, Archives of American Art.

were not as yet hung. He looked at those paintings; and, among other things, he saw the target, the faces, the Museum piece. He said (just imagine how sloppy I was at that time), “Can I take that along in a cab?” And I didn’t even ask what he wanted to do with it. I said, “Yes, of course, you can take it.” He said, “Well, you know, I want to make a color photograph of it.” But he didn’t say that he wanted to put it on the cover and I didn’t ask. Then we had that wonderful surprise of having it on the cover.²⁴

Several aspects of Castelli’s account here, given just under a decade after the show in question, stick out as remarkably odd. Not only does he claim that he was willing to let a visual centerpiece of the show disappear into a taxi for an unknown reason shortly before the show opened, but he teases that it would be this object that would headline Johns’s entrance into the hallowed domain of MoMA’s permanent collection. The ascendance of *Target with Four Faces* to the role of “the museum piece” tantalizingly appears as a preordained conclusion of future events. Moreover, Castelli entirely sidestepped the actual question: how did Hess know to visit the soon-to-be-bombshell exhibition before it had even been hung?²⁵ Such slippages are characteristic of Castelli’s later renditions of history-making episodes. And while no evidence survives that this coverage was in any way paid for by Castelli, the episode at least attests to an uncommonly coordinated relationship between a motivated dealer and an ostensibly independent critic.

In hindsight, Hess’s role as a silent partner appears pivotal. Three days before the Johns show opened, and right around the time that Hess had come to preview it, Hess, Barr, and frequent Greenberg disputant Harold Rosenberg participated in a panel at the Club, a famed gathering place for Abstract Expressionist figures that had, by that time, lost much of the vitality that characterized it during Castelli’s prior affiliation. Indeed, the critic Irving Sandler had gathered his esteemed panel to discuss the question, “Has the Situation Changed?” Were the tenets of Greenbergian modernism being

24. Cummings, “Interview with Leo Castelli.” This same account, with the slippage in Hess’s discovery of the show, is repeated on page 31 of the transcript of his unpublished interview with Alan Jones. See Leo Castelli Gallery Files, Archives of American Art. The repetition of this denial belies Castelli’s careful tracking of the impact of public relations on behalf of his gallery, and again suggests strategy and deal-making rather than inexplicable luck.

25. This episode is further woven into mythological origin by Tomkins’s 1980 profile of Castelli in the *New Yorker*. This article did much to solidify Castelli’s popular image as the archetypal contemporary art dealer. Tomkins credits this episode as serving to announce “from Milan to Tokyo, that Abstract Impressionism’s hegemony was broken” (57).

in any way challenged as the prevailing orthodoxies of the art world? While artist Allan Kaprow's Cagean plea to dissolve art out into the wider ocean of everyday existence met with a mixed reaction from the audience, the invited speakers shared Kaprow's sense that the New York School had become a victim of its own success. With perhaps more than a note of historical foreshadowing, Barr is recorded to have told the audience, "I look forward to a rebellion, but I don't see it. Am I blind or does it exist?"²⁶

While Hess and his cover story have been credited with the miraculous return of sight, actual events were evidently more complex. The aforementioned sensation of the Johns cover belies the thin coverage the show actually received. The magazine published only an unsigned 250-word review—sandwiched among dozens of others—which essentially damned the artist by faint praise. The appeal of the work, the reviewer claimed, lay primarily in the childlike gaze that the art seemed to foster. But perhaps the key interpretive text lay not in the review itself but in the small sidebar in the table of contents, which explained that Johns was "the newest member of a movement of young American artists to turn to a sort of neo-Dada."²⁷ The recurrence of this periodizing term again suggests Castelli's influence. Hess was no admirer of European Dada; five years later he would write one of the last serious polemics denouncing the fraudulent status of the Duchampian readymade.²⁸ Nevertheless, his magazine reinscribed the valorization offered by the as-yet-unheralded Rosenblum. Given the incongruities—the headline cover story that was only a short review, the sidebar repetition of an overdetermined term of periodization—it is hard not to see the public-relations mind of Castelli at work here.²⁹

The question of Castelli's quasi-authorship of the neo-Dada rubric becomes all the more significant in light of the traction that Johns and the term gained together. While in her essay accompanying a 2009 Johns retrospective, MoMA curator Carolyn Lanchner emphasizes the confusion generated by the "indiscriminate, and often contradictors ways" in which the neologism was originally used, Hess and Rosenblum indisputably conjured a new American life for the strains of European Dada that were quickly

26. Quoted in Christina Bryan Rosenberger, *Drawing the Line: The Early Work of Agnes Martin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 109.

27. *Art News*, March 1958. Review, p. 20, table of contents, p. 5.

28. Thomas B. Hess, "J'Accuse Marcel Duchamp," *Art News* 63, no. 10 (February 1965): 44–45, 52–54.

29. For more on the unusually aggressive nature of Castelli PR, see Marquis, *The Pop Revolution*, 41.

disappearing over the historical horizon. It must have made for a strange encounter when, several months after Hess's review came out, Johns met Duchamp for the first time with no real knowledge of who the elder artist was.³⁰ But whatever the private reaction of shy, laconic Johns, Castelli and many others were quick to announce that a way out of the historical cul-de-sac identified by Barr had been found. Castelli described the Johns exhibition as a "death knell," while Robert Morris, an artist to whom Castelli would grow close in the late 1960s, insisted that New York School painting had been "largely euthanized by Johns."³¹ It seemed that "the other thing," for which Barr and others had searched, was in some mixture discovered and created by Castelli. What remained was to profit from it.

SELLING SIGNS

As might be expected after such a banner opening, Johns quickly worked his way to the center of Castelli's exhibition program, repeatedly participating in group shows in 1959, as well as solo shows in Castelli's space in New York (1961) and in a Castelli-assisted space in Paris (1960). Notably, Johns also began to produce sculptural objects, first in the amateur-targeted hobbyist *Sculp Metal* and then quickly in cast bronze.³² While the introduction of the bronze attests to Castelli's financial backing of his new prodigy, the dealer was not content to simply provide access to the esteemed (and expensive) medium of historical sculpture. Such a storied medium would need an accompanying story.

This new interpretive credibility would be found through the writing of Leo Steinberg. Along with his NYU classmate Robert Rosenblum and the eminent medievalist Meyer Schapiro, Steinberg was a key member of an emerging circle of writers with both highly burnished academic credentials and an adventurous willingness to engage with the art of their own time. Importantly, Castelli's cultivation of relationships with historians and professors was virtually without precedent. The most influential theorists of the New York School, Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg, were both full-time critics rather than academics. And strikingly, when Green-

30. Roni Feinstein, "New Thoughts for Jasper Johns' Sculpture," *Arts* (April 1980): 142.

31. Cummings, "Interview with Leo Castelli." See also Robert Morris, *Have I Reasons: Work and Writings, 1993–2007* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 239.

32. James Fenton, *Leonardo's Nephew: Essays on Art and Artists* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 235.

berg interacted with leading Abstract Expressionist dealer Betty Parsons, he was often working to temper the career-minded expectations of her artists rather than, as in the Castelli/Steinberg case, to accelerate them.³³ Moreover, the analysis of contemporaneous art was considered far beyond the pale of serious academic study. A grim anecdote recounts the entry of mid-20th-century art into the discipline of art history: Rosalind Krauss, perhaps the most influential living professor of modern or contemporary art history, was only allowed to complete a dissertation on the sculptor David Smith because of his tragic death in a car accident.³⁴ Arguably, the hermetic division between historical study and contemporary practice was first breached by Schapiro, who served on the acquisitions committee of MoMA, lending his considerable reputation to their consideration of Pollock. It was Schapiro who had curated the exhibition at the Jewish Museum in which Castelli first encountered Jasper Johns. Schapiro selected the young Leo Steinberg to write the catalog essay.

Steinberg's recent completion of a PhD thesis on Baroque architecture might appear to make him a strange fit to theorize Castelli's envisioned reincarnation of European Dada. But as a bona fide academic willing to work on commission, Steinberg more than fit the bill. Although his "Jasper Johns: The First Seven Years of His Art" has become well known as the foundation of the academically rigorous Jasper Johns literature, the backstory of its writing has not received serious attention. The fact that Castelli commissioned this scholarly essay—which featured an extended, and sometimes head-scratching interview between the erudite Steinberg and the reticent, intuitive Johns—was never acknowledged in print. It was, however, an open-enough secret that Castelli was willing to mention it in an offhanded remark in a 1969 interview: "you probably remember where I had financed an important study on the part of Leo Steinberg on Jasper Johns."³⁵ But Castelli's insouciance belies the deeply unusual nature of this transaction: financing the creation of a scholarly record in a manner in which the com-

33. Deborah Solomon, *Jackson Pollock: A Biography* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2001), 229.

34. Richard Meyer, *What Was Contemporary Art?* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2013), 1–3.

35. Cummings, "Interview with Leo Castelli." Notably, this episode has received little scrutiny in the literature, with historian Catherine Dossin's claim that this article, as well as Johns's appearance on the *Art News* cover, should be understood as examples of Castelli's "generosity." Catherine Dossin, *The Rise and Fall of American Art, 1940s–1980s: A Geopolitics of Western Art Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 134. Steinberg's version of events is corroborated by Greenfield, "Sort of the Svengali of Pop," *New York Times Magazine* (May 1966): 42–43.

missioned status of the essay was not officially acknowledged. It seems that the success of his prior ventures with Hess and Rosenblum had encouraged Castelli to double down on this strategy.³⁶

The actual origin of the commission remains somewhat murky. Castelli had been engaged in a long back-and-forth with Bruno Alferi, publisher of an Italian art magazine entitled *Metro*, which previously published an extended portfolio of Robert Rauschenberg drawings inspired by Dante's *Inferno*. Eager to have more cutting-edge American work represented in *Metro*'s pages, and impressed by a show of Johns's he had seen at Ileana's gallery in Paris, Alferi communicated to Castelli that he had "very serious intentions" for the fourth issue of his magazine, and that the two of them "should do something really big." Castelli then arranged to have Steinberg write about Johns, and according to Steinberg's later conjectures, added his own funds to supplement the meager commissions of the young magazine.³⁷

Seen in light of this backstory, Steinberg's somewhat baffled assessment of the difficulty presented by Johns's work takes on a new cast, that of the critic searching for something to like about an intellectually obdurate body of work. Steinberg even grants the obtuseness of the objects as grounds for a kind of praise. The most interesting thing about Johns's work, Steinberg insisted, was that he had "managed somehow to discover uninteresting things to paint," a situation that had generated "an impasse for everyone."³⁸ Steinberg was also of course focused on the emergent paradigm of "neo-Dada." While he praised *Art News* for being "bold enough to fly" Johns on its cover, he was less sure that their interpretive lens fitted the singular nature of his work. Noting that the neo-Dada idiom had "untied every tongue," he insisted that Johns's speculating about relationship with European Dada became a kind of substitute for looking at the art itself. It was simply easier

36. Indeed, gallery records show that, like Rosenblum, Steinberg was an ascendant collector as well as an interpreter of Johns's work. By the mid-1960s, he had at least one of Johns's early drawings in his collection. Leo Steinberg Correspondence, Leo Castelli Gallery Files, Archives of American Art.

37. Quoted in Dorothy Jean McKetta, "The Leo Castelli Gallery in *Metro Magazine*: American Approaches to Post-Abstract Figuration in an Italian Context," MA thesis (University of Texas–Austin, 2015), 64. See also Alice Goldfarb Marquis, *The Art Biz: The Covert World of Collectors, Dealers, Auction Houses, Museums and Critics* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1991), 222.

38. Leo Steinberg, "Jasper Johns," *Metro* 4/5 (May 1962): 82–109 (more easily accessed in reprint in Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth Century Art* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007], 22).

to talk about Dada than it was to analyze the curiously circular, almost mute renderings of quotidian objects and signs.³⁹

While, as Steinberg emphasized, a certain degree of difficulty inhered in thinking about ideas as axiomatic as those central to Johns's work, an almost corollary ease characterized Castelli's experience in selling it. By contrast with the commercial doldrums of Castelli's first exhibitions, his Johns solo show proved to be a watershed moment from a financial as well as critical standpoint. Gallery records show that by September 1959, Johns had a multiple collector list that included Robert Scull as well as Burton Tremaine, David Rockefeller, William Rubin, and other important players in the ascendant contemporary American-art power structure.⁴⁰ Indeed, numerous secondary sources recount how Castelli quickly mastered of the art of "placing work" in the hands of the collectors best positioned to advance the gallery and its artists.⁴¹ Such strategic sales had the effect of increasing Castelli's control over the economic fate of the artists he represented. No one collector could lose interest and thereby crater the market, and Castelli could create an additional layer of scarcity by refusing to sell certain pieces on the grounds that they were promised to collectors higher up the food chain. This manufacture, and periodic relief, of scarcity created an environment in which patrons were forced to work with Castelli, rather than simply buy art from him. Again, Castelli did not invent this system—similar practices had been in place since the Gilded Age—but Castelli was able to play individual and institutional collectors off of one another to an extent unheard of in the history of selling living American artists.

And while Barr's purchases had granted Johns an importance that seemed to bear the weight of Castelli's scholarly investments in him, the patron who did the most to advance Johns's commercial viability was Robert Scull, a New York taxi magnate and emergent collector of American contemporary art. Though Scull did not purchase directly from the blockbuster solo show, gallery records reveal a brisk back and forth with Scull buying, selling, and trading close to \$40,000 worth of Johns's work between 1960 and 1962. One particularly notable transaction, which involved both a sale and a trade, involved Scull acquiring \$17,000 worth of Johns's work, the rough equivalent of \$150,000 in today's dollars.⁴²

39. Steinberg, "Jasper Johns," 23.

40. Leo Castelli Gallery Files, Archives of American Art.

41. See for example Martin S. Ackerman, *Smart Money and Art: Investing in Fine Art* (Bartown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1986), 99.

42. Robert Scull Correspondence, Leo Castelli Gallery Files, Archives of American Art. Reproduction images of gallery ledgers available on request.

While this chapter will return to Scull, the weight of his early financial backing of both Johns and Castelli merits a brief re-examination of a now-iconic story of Johns's meteoric rise to commercial success through Castelli's ingenuity. Bitter about the seemingly easy success that was then buoying the next generation, the Abstract Expressionist painter Willem de Kooning, with whom Castelli had always had an uneven relationship, caustically remarked at a party, "You could give that son of a bitch two beer cans and he could sell them." Johns was inspired to turn the concept into a sculpture, and his *Painted Bronze* (1962) was promptly sold Robert Scull.⁴³ Much has been made of this episode, which has been read as a humorous anecdote confirming Castelli's singular salesmanship as well as serious evidence of Johns's newly foregrounded relationship with the Duchampian readymade.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind the degree to which the piece is a monument to Scull, and a metonym for the changes in art history that can be effected when the monetary interests of ascendant tycoons such as Scull aligned with the stratagems of a gallerist such as Castelli.

Indeed, the impact of the relationship forged between Castelli and Scull would be hard to overstate. Ten years after the episode of *Painted Bronze*, Scull decided to put fifty works from his growing collection up for auction. The resulting "Scull Sale," as it has come to be known, shattered many long-standing records. The most dramatic moment of the night came from a momentarily contentious exchange between Scull and Rauschenberg, after the latter's *Thaw* (1958) sold for \$85,000, almost a ninety-fold increase. But the banner sale of the night—and the highest price ever paid for a living American artist—went to Jasper Johns's *Double White Map*, which sold for the eye-popping price of \$240,000. As Noah Horowitz has recently observed, "in the aftermath of the Scull sale, a more financially shrewd era in the art market seemingly emerged. Dealers, artists, and collectors became more status and investment conscious, both the scale and ambition of work grew ever larger, and prices were set more aggressively."⁴⁵ While scholars including Horowitz concede that the impact of the sale has occurred primarily at the level of lore—as the origin point for the contemporary state

43. Tomkins *Off the Wall*, 62. See also Erika Lee Doss, *Twentieth-Century American Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 155.

44. Martha Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 65.

45. Noah Horowitz, *Art of the Deal: Contemporary Art in a Global Financial Market* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 10. See also Baruch D. Kirschenbaum, "The Scull Auction and the Scull Film," *Art Journal* 39, no. 1 (Autumn 1979): 50–54. Tim Schneider, "A Toast to the End Times," *The Gray Market* (May 13, 2016), <http://www.thegray-market.com/blog/2016/5/10/a-toast-to-the-end-times> (accessed 3/1/18).

of the market—the sale has nevertheless cemented itself into the collective financial imaginary of the art world.

As it turns out, the direct financial interactions between Castelli and Scull began much earlier—nearly a full decade before the iconic auction—and involved an incredible set of stratagems for exploiting the underdeveloped enforcement of regulations governing the appraisal of works donated to museums. But the ways in which Castelli orchestrated the financial underpinnings of the market around his gallery comprise an element of this story that must come after attending to the singular way in which Castelli positioned his stable to take advantage of this new market. And what began with behind-the-scenes maneuvering to secure a favorable scholarly reception in the late 1950s grew into something of a wholly different scale in the lead-up to the 1964 Venice Biennale.

THE RETURN TO ITALY

As we have seen, Castelli had been interested in playing across the gap between European and American artists and patrons since the beginning of his commercial ventures. Having failed to convince either Sidney Janis or Alfred Barr to back his European outpost, he focused on mixing European and American artists in exhibitions at his 57th Street gallery. When he separated on good terms from his wife, he retained her and her newly opened gallery as allies in his efforts to give American artists the prestigious stamp of European approval. “Neo-Dada” would need to return to its European roots to see its ascendance into the historical canon solidified. Indeed, Castelli had unprecedented success giving early-career American artists access to European audiences. By 1960, less than two years after their solo shows at Castelli gallery, Johns and Rauschenberg each mounted a pair of solo shows, with Johns appearing in Paris and Milan, while Rauschenberg’s were in Rome and Dusseldorf. While Rauschenberg had shown overseas before his affiliation with Castelli, such exposure was entirely new to Johns. As historian Titia Hulst has observed, this short time frame looks all the more remarkable compared against the nine years it took Pollock to go from his breakout presentation in Peggy Guggenheim’s *Art of This Century* to his first European solo show.⁴⁶

46. Titia Hulst, “The Leo Castelli Gallery,” *Archives of American Art Journal* 46, no. 3/4 (2007): 24.

Castelli's persistent efforts at the European angle make all the more sense in light of the somewhat circumscribed nature of the New York art world. While Castelli could continue advocating for his stable with and through young academics such as Steinberg and Rosenblum, the primary avenue for serious validation was still through the channels of MoMA. The museum had already acquired several of Johns's works, but Barr remained frustratingly resistant to Castelli's entreaties on behalf of Rauschenberg.⁴⁷ Recognizing the impasse, Castelli began to campaign on behalf of the artist most recently brought into his fold, the young Frank Stella, in whose shaped canvases Castelli saw an additional iteration of the unsettled painting/object binary touched off by Jasper Johns's *Flags*.⁴⁸ Through some mixture of fortuitous timing and carefully applied pressure—the conflicting narratives around this encounter make the precise details difficult to pin down—Castelli succeeded in getting Stella into Dorothy Miller's *Sixteen Americans* survey show at MoMA, an inclusion that would lead to the acquisition of Stella's enormous, Stygian *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor II* (1959). But the size and severity of the object, combined with the young age of its maker, would make for a fight with the MoMA board that would prove costly not only for Barr's political capital, but for his relationship with Castelli. It would be over a decade before the museum would purchase another Stella.

With MoMA seeming to drift farther out of his sphere of influence, Castelli began cultivating another strategically placed ally, the new director of the Jewish Museum, Alan Solomon.⁴⁹ Although it had been recently mounting shows such as *Artists of the New School: Second Generation*, the broad survey in which Castelli had first encountered Johns, the museum's reputation suffered from an association, as one collector put it, with “shows of synagogue silver.” Hoping to shift public perception, Solomon developed a robust program of challenging works by contemporary artists, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Solomon made a natural partner for Castelli, and the two quickly bonded over their shared artistic interests and synchronous divorces. According to Castelli, after arriving in New York to assume his directorship, Solomon “proceeded immediately” to Rauschenberg's inaugural solo exhibition, and “really transformed himself” into an urbane sophisticate. Looking for an opportunity to cultivate a relationship with the ascendant tastemaker Castelli, Solomon mounted solo exhibitions for Robert Rauschenberg in

47. Jones, “Interview with Leo Castelli,” 33. Cohen-Solal, *Leo and His Circle*, 253.

48. Cummings, “Interview with Jasper Johns.”

49. For more on Solomon and Castelli, see Goldfarb-Marquis, *The Pop Revolution*, 51.

1963, and the following year, for Jasper Johns. These museum retrospectives given to young American artists were, as Castelli's biographer called them, "an unimaginable bonanza" for Castelli and his ambitions.⁵⁰

Thus, when Solomon was invited to direct the American exhibition at the Venice Biennale, the oldest and most prestigious international festival of contemporary art, Castelli was handed an historic opportunity to secure for his circle of artists an unparalleled mark of approval from high European cultural tastemakers. Solomon's selection of his American "dream team" was telling: half of the artists came from Castelli's stable. The battle to take home the gold, however, would be uphill. No American had ever won an award of significance until Alexander Calder took home a grand prize in Sculpture in 1952, more than a decade before, and there had been no other success to speak of since. Nevertheless, as a native Italian with substantial familiarity with the French art world—from which the primary competition would come—Castelli was well positioned. Between Castelli and Ileana, who had been working on the jury for over a year, an aggressive public relations campaign was launched on behalf of Robert Rauschenberg. Castelli arranged for advertisements to be placed in major international art magazines, gave away photographs and pamphlets to members of the public, and worked jurors privately, arranging private viewings and even banquets in their honor.⁵¹ Perhaps the *coup de grâce* was Castelli's arrangement of a performance by the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, for which Rauschenberg would orchestrate the lightning and set design. The performance polarized critical opinion, but the publicity catapulted Rauschenberg into pole position for the prize in Painting.⁵²

When Castelli arrived in Venice to provide on-the-ground assistance, Solomon was enormously relieved. Solomon had been dealing with an unforeseen problem that was compounding the usual logistical snarls that arise when organizing a massive exhibition in a medieval city halfway around the world. Given the pervasive sense that the United States was supplanting Paris as the global capital of the art world, as well as the increasing spending on arts diplomacy as a new front in the Cold War, the federal government had been keen to provide Solomon with a surfeit of resources. This unprecedented support included a chartered military transport plane for the shipping of artworks. As a result, the American pavilion ballooned to over

50. Quotes from Cohen-Solal, *Leo and His Circle*, 271–73. These accounts are corroborated by Tomkins, *Off the Wall*, 66–67.

51. Hulst, "The Leo Castelli Gallery," 25.

52. Tomkins, *Off the Wall*, 67.

100 works by eight different artists, and outgrew its designated presentation venue. Through USAID, the government agency backing the Venice venture, another annex was found to show the overflow work, but whether works exhibited outside the dedicated space could be eligible for the festival's prizes became a hotly contested point among the Biennale jurors.⁵³

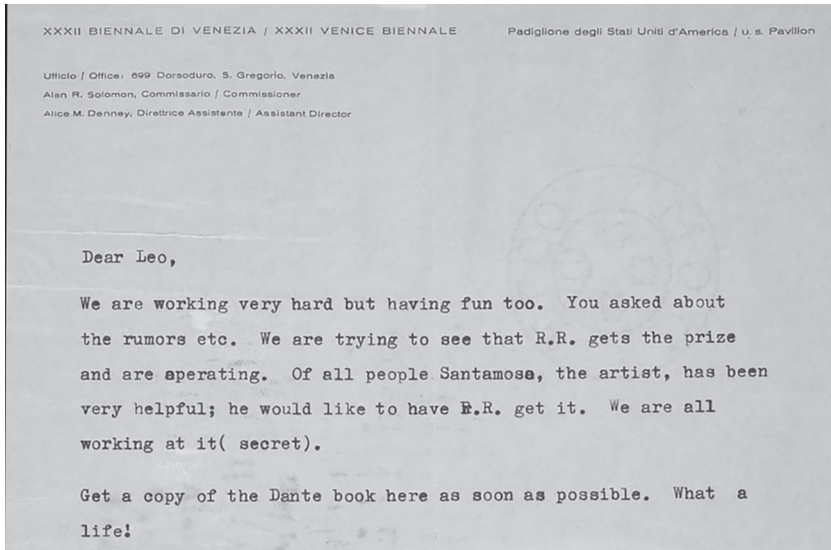
This site/nonsite debate became the ground for what sources have described as intensive horse-trading behind the scenes. While early rounds of voting showed Rauschenberg in a leading position to take home the grand prize, the question of his location outside of the predrawn boundary seemed to call his victory into question. When it seemed as though this would result in a disqualification, the jury settled on the American Kenneth Noland as an alternate winner.⁵⁴ Noland's selection would have been an unmitigated disaster for Castelli. Not only would an American outside of Castelli's orbit have usurped his opportunity to secure the first Golden Lion for painting, but Noland's painting represented the waning (but still extant) influence of the Greenbergian modernism to which Castelli had been positioning his circle as the next historical step. To see the ostensibly retrograde abstraction win out over its purported successor would have been catastrophic for the historicizing arguments Castelli had been carefully crafting. Solomon was not to let Castelli down, however, and arranged for the emergency boat transport of a Rauschenberg canvas from the US consulate to the official American Pavilion.⁵⁵ Disaster was avoided, and neo-Dada won the day. Rauschenberg was awarded the international Grand Prize for Painting, the first such award given to an American.

The degree and importance of Castelli's involvement in behind-the-scenes maneuvering remains a subject of contention. Two years after the Venice victory, the *New York Times* Sunday magazine featured a profile of Castelli, "Sort of the Svengali of Pop," which leveled anonymously sourced accusations of underhandedness against the dealer in both his daily operations and in his campaigns at the Biennale. While this particular article received voluminous pushback from Castelli's well-connected allies, a pervasive sense remains that the dealer played a dramatically outsized role in orchestrating events over which he, theoretically, should not have held any sway. Such things as the hired-gun approach to academic historicization were just not

53. For an authoritative treatment of the Venice Biennale episode, see Hiroko Ikegami, "A Spectacle in Venice," in *The Great Migrator: Robert Rauschenberg and the Global Rise of American Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 57–102.

54. Cohen-Solal, *Leo and His Circle*, 297.

55. Tomkins, *Off the Wall*, 67.



Telegram from Alan Solomon to Leo Castelli (1964). (Image courtesy Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.)

done before Castelli arrived on the scene. And while the details of verbal backroom deal-making are probably lost to history, a tantalizing note survives in Castelli's files. Dated June 3, 1964, Alan Solomon wrote to Castelli to update him on the installation logistics of Rauschenberg's work. "You asked about the rumors etc.," Solomon writes, "we are trying to see that R.R. gets the prize. . . . We are all working at it (secret)."⁵⁶ Whatever the specifics, and whatever the ethics, it is clear that Castelli had an active hand in managing the breakthrough success of the first American award of a Grand Prize in Painting to his young artist Robert Rauschenberg.

And of course, the triumph of the Biennale only furthered the commercial appeal of Castelli's artists. As historian Titia Hulst has also noted, the year following the Biennale, the first auction of contemporary American artists took place at the Parke-Bernet Gallery in New York. Rauschenberg's *Express*, a mixed-media silkscreen that was only two years old, sold for then-eye popping sum of \$20,000, trumping the prices commanded by canvases produced by the much more deeply established painters Franz Kline and Mark Roth-

56. 1964 Venice Biennale Correspondence, Leo Castelli Gallery Files, Archives of American Art. Image available on request.

ko.⁵⁷ Indeed, the Biennale episode speaks to the power of Castelli's marketing efforts, which grew from plying a network of New York-based intellectuals and patrons into a multifaceted public-relations campaign on the largest stage of the international art world. And to fully attend to the means by which the Johns/Rauschenberg nexus ascended from contemporary sensation to a fully vested historical successor to Greenbergian modernism, it is necessary to explore the innovations in buying and selling, rather than simply marketing, that Castelli introduced to the art under the banner of his gallery.

CHANGING THE MODEL

Indeed, one of the most important shifts that Castelli made in the operation of his gallery was to pay his exhibiting artists a regular stipend, rather than providing them only commissions from (often irregular) sales. This was far from an unheard-of practice when Castelli introduced it, it having been a regular feature of European cultural patronage for centuries. It was, however, markedly unusual in the market-driven US, and it occasioned profound gratitude from the artists, who felt themselves the beneficiaries of unprecedented munificence.⁵⁸ Indeed, much like the broader commercial success of his early venture, the origins of Castelli's stipend system seem to lie in a Jasper Johns-related accident. As the artist has recounted, Johns requested that Castelli amortize the funds from a particularly large sale, and these regular payments eventually grew into a paradigm that structured the finances of the gallery as a whole.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, the origins and intentions of the practice are much less significant than its ramifications. Indeed, the stipend system may go some distance to explaining the nature of the break articulated by the circle of Castelli's artists from the prior generation of New York School painters. Namely, these painters had worked, with few exceptions, on commission, receiving between 60 and 70 percent of a work's sale price.⁶⁰ However, gal-

57. Hulst, "Leo Castelli Gallery," 25.

58. For more on the history of gallery stipends, see Olav Velthuis and Stefano Baia Curion, eds., *Cosmopolitan Canvases: The Globalization of Markets for Contemporary Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2015), 65–66. See also Hulst, "Leo Castelli Gallery," 23.

59. Jasper Johns Correspondence File, Leo Castelli Archives, Archives of American Art.

60. Alan Jones, "Interview with Leo Castelli," 31. Elayne Varian, "Interview with Betty Parsons." Exhibition records of the Contemporary Wing of the Finch College Museum of Art, Archives of American Art.

lerists such as Betty Parsons maintained only a small circle of wealthy clients, and the sales generated in this ecosystem were often painfully sporadic. The history of Parsons's interactions with her stable of Pollock, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, and others is littered with episodes of their discontent over the lack of livable commissions.⁶¹ Significantly, patron demand was largely inelastic: collectors buying unique, prestige objects would be unlikely to buy additional works if the price were to be lowered. As such, strong financial incentives impelled the New York School artists to maximize each rare sale by making their work as expensive as possible—high prices often justified by dint of the size and singularity of the object under consideration.

But under Castelli's system, this set of factors was turned on its head. With the full knowledge that they would receive their expected stipend irrespective of the highs and lows of the sales cycle, and with a heterogeneous roster providing a hedge for each individual member, Castelli artists were free to make a motley assortment of things. And just as the market conditions around the New York School reinscribed its essential aesthetic and ideological characteristics (the emphasis on rugged individuality working itself out on heroically scaled canvases), so too the inherently variegated approach of Castelli's neo-Dadaists was supported by a financial infrastructure that fit well with the production of a mix of paintings, sculptures, and object-collages.

This shift, from a commissioned to a salaried model, might have remained a kind of curious quirk were it not for a confluence of two sets of circumstances that enormously magnified its impact on the shape of postwar art history. The first, comparatively well-documented factor was the contemporaneous explosion of popular interest in the market for living American artists. Between December and January of 1955–56, *Fortune* magazine ran a two-part article detailing the investment possibilities in the international art world, noting that the prices of “the ‘hottest’ moderns” had gone up by a factor of ten over the preceding decade, and that, for every Impressionist canvas for sale between \$50,000 and \$100,000, there might be more than “one hundred eager customers waiting.” Most strikingly, the authors provided a helpful guide to the periodization of the art market, typically divided into Old Master, Impressionist and Post-Impressionist, and Modern, terms with which its readers would be more familiar. Old Masters were “gilt edged securities,” while Impressionist canvases were “blue chip stocks” and Mod-

61. Francis Frascina, ed., *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* (New York: Psychology Press, 2000), 290. See also Deborah Solomon, *Jackson Pollock*, 229.

erns were “speculative” investments.⁶² Though this language of investment potential has become commonplace, such a lens was a striking departure—in both its instrumentalization and its ostensible democratization—for a pursuit that had until recently been seen as the purview of those with the aristocratic erudition and the means to disregard financial imperatives.

Indeed, “The Great International Art Market” feature was followed by a profusion of popular literature that focused on lowering the barrier of entry for new collectors. *The New York Times*, *Cosmopolitan*, and others periodicals featured lifestyle pieces that dealt with integrating an art collection into a livable domestic space.⁶³ Sears corporation hired the actor Vincent Price, a well-regarded collector in his own right, to serve as an art advisor for original objects that could be sold in its department stores, a venture that sold over two million dollars of art in its first two-and-a-half years.⁶⁴ This attitude toward a newly democratized market is perhaps most clearly seen in Irwin W. Solomon’s 1961 volume *How to Start and Build an Art Collection*, which concludes with a series of case studies on patrons such as Albert Barnes, whose distinctive tastes became the grounds for esteemed, dramatically valuable collections.⁶⁵ Moreover, the effect created by the growth of “amateur” collecting was amplified by a concomitant increase in corporate collecting, an emergent practice with a scope and impact that scholars are only now beginning to understand.⁶⁶ It was this fevered moment in the mid-1960s art market that led the artist Allan Kaprow to caustically deliver one of his most famous lines: “If artists were in hell in 1946, now they are in business.”⁶⁷

This acceleration was fully underway in 1957, the year that Castelli officially opened the doors of his gallery. Just two weeks before his premier exhibi-

62. Eric Hodgins and Parker Lesley, “The Great International Art Market,” *Fortune* 55, no. 6 (1955/1956), 119.

63. See for example Rita Reff, “A Tour of Offbeat Rooms for Art,” *New York Times* (25 March 1966): 46. T. F. James, “How Fine Art Affects Your Life,” *Cosmopolitan* 146 (February 1959): 34. The emergence of this type of new collector can be seen in Henry Miller’s attempts to interrogate his interviewer in Merle Armitage, “The Man Behind the Smile: Doing Business with Henry Miller,” *Texas Quarterly* IV (Winter 1961): 156.

64. Charlotte Willard, “The Corporation as Art Collector,” *Look* (March 23, 1965), 71. See also Goldfarb Marquis, *The Pop Revolution*, 118.

65. Irwin Solomon, *New Frontiers: How to Start and Build an Art Collection* (Philadelphia: Chilton, 1961), 118–30.

66. See for example *Readers Digest*, “Our Newest Patron of the Arts” (May 1960): 192–98. Henry Seldis, “Business Buys Art,” *Art in America* 52 (February 1964): 131–34. Charlotte Willard, “The Corporation as Art Collector,” 67–72.

67. Allan Kaprow, “The Artist as Man of the World,” in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 47.

bition, the *New York Times* declared the existence of “a boom of unparalleled dimensions, steadily building up for several years,” that had “come to the art galleries of New York.”⁶⁸ The *Times* piece notes two facets of this rising tide that are significant to the present discussion. The first, in keeping with the above-mentioned literature, was the *Times*’s emphasis on what one gallery owner described as “a ‘descendency’ in caste.” The new collecting boom was being fueled not by the gentlemanly connoisseurs of a prior generation, but by a new class of buyer, young professionals and even housewives, with prices ranging as low as etchings available for \$10 monthly installments. But curiously, the *Times* also noted that some of the new buying interest was stemming from “business men with whom tax considerations may weigh as heavily as esthetic gratification.” This observation brings up the second factor, much less analyzed in the scholarly literature on the period, that amplified the moves Castelli made on the financial side of his gallery: the potential for creative use, and abuse, of the tax code.

TAXING THE SYSTEM

This potential was indeed enormous. The early 1960s was a period in which the federal government was working to undo the astronomical tax rates paid by America’s top earners, which, dating back to the throes of the Great Depression, had been as high as 94 percent. Beyond the straightforward rollback in rates, the government also increased the number and the amount of allowable deductions—ways to reduce, not the tax rate, but the portion of one’s income subject to taxation. Indeed, one of the key means through which the federal government encouraged contributions to charity was to allow individuals to “deduct” that contribution from their income reported for tax purposes. For example, assume an individual has a taxable income for a year of \$100,000, and assume further that a top marginal rate of 50 percent applies to all taxable income over \$75,000. If that individual donates \$10,000 to a qualified charity, her taxable income would be reduced from \$100,000 to \$90,000. That \$10,000 deduction would thus result in a \$5,000 tax savings at the 50 percent marginal rate.

Some of the most historically important beneficiaries of tax-incentivized

68. Clarence Dean, “Peak Demand for Pictures: East Tenth Street, as Well as East 57th Street, Is Experiencing an Unparalleled Boom in Art Collecting,” *New York Times* (February 25, 1957): 1. See also Goldfarb-Marquis, *Pop Revolution*, 45.

giving have been educational institutions, including art museums. Starting with the War Revenue Act of 1917, taxpayers were allowed to deduct up to 15 percent of their taxable income from such gifts, a percentage that has steadily grown through the decades.⁶⁹ But while relevant portions of prior law covered donations of property or goods rather than cash, the donation of artworks, a possibility largely confined to the narrow territory of museums designated as charities, was not addressed as a special case. However, the valuation of artworks, different than other kinds of commonly donated property such as real estate, is a significantly more subjective process. This subjectivity created a unique potential for abuse through the manipulation of the appraisals that identified the value of donated works for tax purposes. In the middle 1960s, the tax rate for high-income earners were still much steeper than today's. For example, an individual with taxable income of \$30,000 in 1965 would be subject to a top marginal rate of 53 percent.⁷⁰ Moreover, until 1969, there were relatively few limits on deductions of appreciated property (property that had gained in value since it was purchased). Whatever one might think of the economic or moral logic of such tax rates, or the lack of limits imposed on deductions, this set of parameters created an open invitation for the manipulation of appraisals of works of art donated to museums.

Consider, for example, the hypothetical case of a wealthy collector, unmarried for the sake of calculation, earning \$60,000 annually, who might take home \$25,520 after income taxes. Our imagined patron might purchase a Jasper Johns from Leo Castelli for \$10,000, which was standard for his larger canvases in the early 1960s, and then subsequently take a deduction by donating it to MoMA (and thus reducing his taxable income by \$10,000). In this scenario, he would be left with \$19,620, with his purchase and munificence having cost him a total of \$6,900. But if in this hypothetical scenario, his purchase proved to be a sound financial investment, and if evidence could be marshaled to demonstrate that his purchase had accrued in value, then his tax burden might be reduced more significantly. Imagine that the work had doubled in value, an extremely conservative scenario given the publicity and scholarly recognition that Castelli was orchestrating for his stable. He could then donate the work and write off the work's new value of \$20,000 from his taxes. This donation could knock him down several brackets, resulting in an after-tax income of \$29,060, \$5,000 more than if

69. Vada Waters Lindsey, "Charitable Contribution Deduction: A Historical Review and a Look to the Future," *Nebraska Law Review* 81 (2003): 1061.

70. US Tax Foundation, "Federal Individual Income Tax Rates History," https://files.tax-foundation.org/legacy/docs/fed_individual_rate_history_nominal.pdf (accessed 11/12/17).

the purchase and donation had never been made. This essentially means that, by buying and then donating a work of art, our collector could realize a gain equal to almost half of the work's appreciation. All the more strikingly, until the year 1964, a taxpayer could collect a deduction on art with only a declared an intention to donate many years down the road.⁷¹

This comparative profit is all the more striking when one compares the alternative of selling the newly appreciated work. The gain from the sale would have been subject to a capital gains tax of 35 percent. So while our potential patron would need to find a real buyer willing to pay double for a recently created work to net a profit of \$6,500, he would only need to find an appraiser willing to attest to the increase in value to net a profit of nearly \$5,000. Prior to the 1980s, the receiving museums frequently provided such appraisals directly, offering this as a service to both appease donors and trustees as well as way of facilitating the donations of (highly valued) works to their own collections.⁷² Moreover, the possibility of high-tax-incentivized giving to a museum not only makes an investment in art more liquid—easier to convert back to cash—but it also makes it more secure, more protected against depreciation. For most kinds of assets, a decline in price would leave a buyer stuck with a loss. However, little would prevent such a collector from donating the piece to a museum and deducting the full purchase price from his taxes. In this way, the porous tax code of the middle 1960s provided both a potential for significant tax savings and an investment backstop to collectors of contemporary American art.

An important turning point in this story occurred in 1963, when Treasury proposed regulations that were actually aimed at cutting down abuses of the charitable deduction by strengthening the requirements for substantiation of the value of charitable contributions. The details of the changes were circulated among members of the Art Dealers Association (ADA), an organization for commercial galleries mostly based in New York City, of which Castelli was a founding member. Administrative secretary Ralph Colin circulated a memo delineating the new appraisal requirements to ADA members during the “notice and comment” period of regulatory review, a window in which the industry groups most likely to be affected by the proposed change were invited to provide feedback to the regulatory agency. In the memo sent to ADA members, administrative secretary Ralph Colin noted, “I see nothing in the proposed regulations that would be objectionable to our members or

71. Marquis, *The Art Biz*, 332.

72. Ildiko P. DeAngelis and Lela Hersh, “Appraisals of Collection Objects: Issues for Museums,” brief published by American Law Institute—American Bar Association Continuing Legal Education (2000), 1.

to their collector-customers.”⁷³ The purpose of this change was to cut down deduction abuses by requiring more independence, and more documentation, from appraisers valuing donated property. The change turned out to be an enormous boon for ADA, which seems to have largely attempted to comply with the requirement that multiple, independent opinions be solicited to value the worth of a donated object. The ADA began to charge fees for its appraisal services, and between 1962 and 1964, the revenue collected from the fees more than quadrupled to where it came to account for 70 percent of the organization’s operating budget.⁷⁴

But it proved to be enormously difficult to ensure “independence” in a realm as insular and opaque as the elite *contemporary* art world. Apparent conflicts of interest, even aside from instances of potential wrongdoing, are replete in the Castelli gallery files. To choose one purposefully above-board example, in 1963 the collector Burton Tremaine wrote to the ADA to ask for an independent appraisal of a large Jackson Pollock painting he owned. Ralph Colin notified Castelli that he had been appointed to the panel that would offer the appraisal, and Castelli, as a former secondary dealer of Pollock’s who was uninvolved with the Tremaine sale, would have been as close to an ideal candidate as Colin would have been likely to find. Castelli promptly responded to the secretary’s request with a reasonable valuation, \$60,000, justifying his figure by reference to a similar work that had recently sold at auction in London (most of Castelli’s subsequent appraisals lack such evidence-based justification). Shortly thereafter, the work was purchased by—not donated to—the MFA Houston. But the difficulty here lies in the fact that Tremaine was one of Castelli’s most enthusiastic clients, becoming actively involved in acquiring both Johns and Rauschenberg. Thus, while there is no evidence that unethical behavior took place in this particular case, Castelli had a financial incentive to appraise the Pollock high to generate more potential sales for himself and his gallery.

THE SMOKING GUN

If this Tremaine transaction represented a paragon of comparative transparency, Castelli’s interactions with Robert Scull demonstrate the jaw-dropping potential for economic gain when gallerist and dealer work to collude with

73. Art Dealers Association Correspondence, Leo Castelli Gallery Files, Archives of American Art.

74. ADA Correspondence, Leo Castelli Gallery Files, Archives of American Art. Correspondence images available on request.

one another.⁷⁵ Scull had been an active client of Castelli's even before the gallery opened in 1957, buying and brokering the sale of paintings of European modernists through the latter's network in the early and middle 1950s. And though he did not directly purchase work from Johns's debut solo show, he helped contribute to a fund that would purchase the now-iconic *Target with 4 Faces* for MoMA. According to gallery records, Scull first became a patron of Johns in 1960 when he encountered his work at the Rive Droite gallery in Paris, and subsequently purchased *Grey Alphabets* (1956). In the immediate wake of this purchase, gallery records indicate that a brisk trade between Castelli and Scull took off, with the latter buying, selling, and trading more than a dozen Johns canvases in the next several years.

In the summer of 1962, a highly unusual event took place. In addition to his role as a customer, Scull became a financial backer of the gallery, loaning Castelli the considerable sum of \$20,000. As recorded by an extensive profile of Castelli published in the *New Yorker* in 1980, the gallery frequently found itself with the need to take out working capital loans—the stipends may have stabilized the cash flow for Castelli's artists, but it shifted the burden of unpredictable sales onto the shoulders of the gallery alone.⁷⁶ But while the practice of taking out a loan to smooth over uneven revenue is common in many industries, a loan from Scull would have placed the erstwhile client in a position of enormous leverage over his debtor/dealer. Against this loan, Castelli provided two Johns and one Rauschenberg work as collateral.⁷⁷ The above-mentioned tax memo was circulated in April 1963, and then, in June 1963, gallery records show a single, bidirectional transaction between Castelli and Scull for a total of \$35,000: a \$20,000 loan repayment and a \$15,000 purchase of Johns's *Map* (1961). Payment was to take place in quarterly installments, with the invoices delivered to the Scull summer home in East Hampton.

Johns's *Map* is a particularly significant example here because it is one of the few of these sorts of transactions that Castelli has spoken candidly about. According to Castelli's recollections, the piece had actually occasioned a bidding war between *nouveau-riche* Sculls and the blue-blooded Tremaines, who seem to have intensely disliked each other. Gallery records are replete with

75. The following account was based on extensive research at the Archives of American Art, supplemented by collaborative research efforts from critic Greg Allen. Allen's account of these financial machinations appeared in print in "How Leo Castelli, MoMA, and Two Wealthy Collectors Charted Today's Rocket-Fueled Art Market," *Art News* (Fall 2019).

76. Tomkins, "Good Eye and Good Ear," 66.

77. Robert Scull File, Leo Castelli Gallery Archives, Archives of American Art.

ROBERT SCULL ACCTS				(6)	
				2-7-63 CREDIT FOR SALE OF CHADWICK + BUTLER SCULPTURES	2400 ⁰⁰
2-7-63	JOHNS LITHOGRAPH #2041	"DEVICE"	180 ⁰⁰		
2-7-63	BUNTECOU DWG #2045	ON MUSEUM	100 ⁰⁰		
				3-29-63 ARMITAGE in TENA	1500 ⁰⁰
6-13-63	REPAYMENT LOAN		20000 ⁰⁰		
6-21-63	JOHNS "MAP"		15,000 ⁰⁰		
	#2163				

Leo Castelli Gallery ledger for Robert Scull (1963). (Image courtesy Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.)

Scull's written complaints about favorable treatment of the better-heeled rivals. The Tremaines, meanwhile, merely alluded to the "opportunism" of those new to the collecting game.⁷⁸ With the rivalry between two of his most important customers looming in the background, their shared interest in *Map* created an impasse for Castelli and Johns. Per Castelli, the logjam was resolved only by Johns's insistence that the piece ultimately be donated to a museum. Scull ultimately won the day, agreeing to donate it MoMA. Donation appraisals through the ADA were of course required. It is worth quoting Castelli at length about what happened next.

As a matter of fact, the Art Dealers Association, which does this evaluation as you know, asked me to give them a value, and they had asked also Ivan [Karp, Castelli's gallery manager]. So Ivan phoned me and said what do you think we should value it at? So, I said, "Well, I think that it should be \$150,000." Ivan said, "Yes. I feel that, too." And that's what we said. Then, this was discussed at the meeting of the Board of Directors of the Art Dealers Association (of which I'm a member, by the way) and they said don't you think it's a little bit high under the circumstances. . . . So they did not feel safe about this estimate. Let's consult some independent sources, maybe the German dealers who handle him and perhaps a Swiss dealer, who has a real sense of value, is well informed. So, we did that and we got replies back. One said 120 and another said 140. So, we decided to have it registered at 130.⁷⁹

Several aspects of this remarkable passage merit additional scrutiny. Most importantly, the actual appraisal figure is wildly out of proportion with anything Johns actually commanded on the commercial market. According to gallery files, Johns's large paintings were typically priced in the \$10,000 range, making the original sale price of \$15,000 on the generous side of reasonable. Castelli's attempt to inflate this figure by an order of magnitude within weeks after its sale can reflect nothing but financial gamesmanship on behalf of Scull and himself. As Castelli was pleased to tell his interviewer, "you can see what a nice deduction he got there."⁸⁰ And while the exact amount by which this donation would have offset Scull's tax burden remain inaccessible without the latter's IRS filings, it must have been an extraordinary windfall.

78. Allen, "How Leo Castelli, MoMA, and Two Wealthy Collectors . . ."

79. Cummings, "Interview with Leo Castelli."

80. Cummings, "Interview with Leo Castelli."

Second, the gross exaggeration necessary to claim this deduction points to the importance, but also the difficulty, of attaining a truly independent appraisal. In the case of Johns, a young, ascendant talent under the almost monopolistic control of a single dealer, the ostensible independence of these European dealers is hard to countenance. Castelli was purposefully capacious in allowing satellite exhibitions of his artists, especially in overseas venues through which they could acquire the European prestige so important to him, but all of these foreign projects would have been organized directly through the Castelli gallery. In this passage, Castelli is probably alluding to Rudolph Zwirner, a Cologne-based Pop Art dealer with whom Castelli shared the business of German mega-collector Peter Ludwig. In no sense would someone like Zwirner, who depended on Castelli for his relationship with Johns and other American Pop stars, have been disinterested in the sense intended by the ADA. This inherent imbrication of financial motives is indeed attested to by Castelli, whose first-person-plural “we decided” on the final appraisal value tips his hand regarding his direct involvement.

Finally, Scull’s gambit was even more audacious than it originally appears. Rather than simply donating the work, he registered it as a fractional gift. Although the museum lists 1963 as the work’s accession date, it was not exhibited at the museum until 1971—in a show of recently acquired objects. In 1964, a year after it had been “donated,” the collectors lent it to Johns’s survey at the Jewish Museum, organized by Alan Solomon.⁸¹ It seems most likely that Scull offered Castelli a no-interest loan, and as part of a quid pro quo, received access to a coveted painting. He paid for the work in installments, but was able to realize tens of thousands in profit through the work by means of an ersatz charitable donation before he had even finished paying for it.

While *Map* comprises a particularly flagrant and singularly well-documented example, evidence for these kinds of irregularities recurs regularly in Castelli’s gallery records. Importantly, the *Map* transaction only surfaced to notice because of Castelli’s offhand remarks made two-thirds of the way through a fourteen-hour series of interviews conducted over the span of several years. Without these offhand comments, the transaction would probably never have been noticed. In the absence of public access to museum financial records at the object level, we are left to speculate on the other anomalies that litter Castelli files. An early Johns acquisition by William Rubin—a collector who would go on to become an important MoMA curator at the end of the 1960s—had its value double over the course of

81. Allen, “How Leo Castelli, MoMA, and Two Wealthy Collectors . . .”

six months with no justification.⁸² Castelli's second, higher appraisal was prepared for insurance purposes rather than explicitly for museum donation, and thus the requirements for multiple valuations were less stringent. Indeed, these insurance appraisals, which Castelli regularly prepared at perfectly rational values, seem to have been on occasion a testing ground for additional gamesmanship. For example, in preparing the loan forms for Johns's exhibition at the Jewish Museum in January 1964, Castelli valued Johns's *White Flag* (1955) at \$50,000, a value out of proportion with the \$1,440 for which Castelli had agreed to sell the piece to Scull two years prior.⁸³ Evidence of machinations spreads out even beyond the appraisal practices. In 1965, Scull became the source of another cash infusion—this time of \$45,000—in exchange for James Rosenquist's massive *F-III* painting. The transaction occupied the murky twilight zone between a purchase (how Castelli explained it to the press) and a collateralized loan (how it was noted in gallery records).⁸⁴ Several weeks later, Castelli would appraise the piece for insurance purposes at \$60,000, a figure he later quoted to the *Washington Post* as the original asking price.⁸⁵ Scull would come to sell the painting at auction, twenty years later, for just over \$2,000,000.

No doubt, such irregularities were not limited to Scull. The above-mentioned *New Yorker* profile from 1980 recounts a tantalizing anecdote concerning Rauschenberg's entry into the collection of MoMA. While photography curator Edward Steichen had purchased a pair of works from the young Rauschenberg in the early 1950s, Castelli had been unable to open museum coffers any further for him. Then, in 1963, an unnamed "Chinese architect" came into the gallery attempting to buy the artist's entire suite of Dante illustration (previously published in *Metro* magazine) to donate it to MoMA. While Castelli's business manager Ivan Karp found the request too *outré*, Castelli followed up, and Barr is reported to have confirmed that the gentleman did in fact inquire about a donation. According to Castelli, Barr had expressed interest in the Dante series to the mystery collector, a claim that strains credulity given Castelli's frequent lament of Barr's unbreakable

82. Jasper Johns Correspondence, Leo Castelli Gallery Files, Archives of American Art. Correspondence images available on request.

83. Robert Scull Correspondence, Leo Castelli Gallery Files, Archives of American Art. Correspondence images available on request.

84. Allen, "How Leo Castelli, MoMA, and Two Wealthy Collectors . . ."

85. Judd Tully, "Rosenquist Work Sold for \$ 2.1 Million," *Washington Post* (November 12, 1986), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1986/11/12/rosenquist-work-sold-for-21-million/a51baaf6-64be-4534-9ee6-45dda817fd93/> (accessed 10/8/2020).

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 WEST 53 STREET NEW YORK 19 N. Y.

Receipt No. T.R. 399.1-34

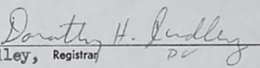
Date received May 14, 1963

RECEIPT

The object(s) described below has (have) been received by The Museum of Modern Art subject to the conditions listed on the reverse.

From Leo Castelli Gallery
4 East 77 Street
New York, New York

For (purpose) the Committee on the Museum Collections.


Dorothy H. Dudley, Registrar

Artist, designer or maker	Description	Price if offered for purchase
RAUCHENBERG, Robert	.1-.34 Thirty-four drawings illustrating Dante's "Inferno". plus 34 exhibition labels entitled Cantos I - XXXIV.	\$ 30,000.

Do not write below this line.

Robert Rauschenberg Dante series invoice (1963). (Image courtesy Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.)

resistance to Rauschenberg.⁸⁶ When the man returned to see Castelli, the dealer learned that the donation was financially motivated; “it was income tax time, and he would rather give to the museum than the IRS.”⁸⁷ As such, Castelli suggested that he donate the funds directly to MoMA, citing \$30,000 as the purchase price. Again this “purchase price” is ambitious to the point of suspicion: double what Castelli then had listed for the largest of Rauschenberg’s paintings, and double per work what Castelli had previously quoted to MoMA for the first four drawings in the series.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, *something* went forward. MoMA’s records list the objects (not funds) as having been given anonymously. Rauschenberg, for his part, remembers something more direct. “One Saturday morning,” he recalled, “Alfred Barr went to Castelli’s, and they bought the Dante’s *Inferno*.”⁸⁹ And while MoMA’s archives are currently closed to public researchers, a note survives in Castelli’s file with the \$30,000 invoice from the museum.⁹⁰

Given the pervasive opacity that characterizes the buying and selling of contemporary art more broadly, such transactions probably only skim the surface of the ways Castelli put the particularities of the financial landscape to work for his artists, his collectors, and himself. In an unpublished interview Castelli granted in 1970, he credits these kinds of maneuvers with differentiating his gallery and its program from the growing competition. Other galleries, Castelli explained, “did not succeed in solving the financial problem, while I, well, had perhaps more imagination in that area than they.”⁹¹ And one need only extrapolate to the ramifying production of Castelli’s stable, which by the end of the decade would include Johns, Rauschenberg, Stella, Warhol, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, and Richard Serra, to grasp the impact of Castelli’s “imagination”: a system in which museum donation produced both a source of easy liquidity and insurance against depreciation. In this easier-to-win/harder-to-lose scenario, it is not difficult to see why the smart money would have been betting on Castelli.

86. Elayne Varian, “Interview with Leo Castelli.” Exhibition Records of the Contemporary Study Wing of the Finch College Museum of Art, 1943–1975, Archives of American Art.

87. Tomkins, *Off the Wall*, 61.

88. Robert Rauschenberg Artist File, Leo Castelli Files, Archives of American Art.

89. Joachim Pissaro, “Interview with Robert Rauschenberg,” *Museum of Modern Art Oral History Project*, available at https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/learn/archives/transcript_rauschenberg.pdf (accessed 10/3/2020). MoMA’s website list the work as having been “given anonymously.”

90. Robert Rauschenberg Artist File, Leo Castelli Files, Archives of American Art.

91. Varian, “Interview with Leo Castelli.”

CONCLUSION, OR MODELING BUSINESS

Importantly, this financial landscape would have also created a set of parameters and possibilities, one that must have deeply impacted the aesthetic development of the artists in Castelli's stable. This is not to suggest that any specific set of choices made by Johns or Rauschenberg should be thought of as reducible to market forces, but rather that the overarching shape of the work produced within Castelli's stable must be understood as responsive to financial as well as art-historical imperatives. For example, while a limited number of elite patrons—and relevant, contemporary-focused museum collections—could absorb the production of large, expensive paintings and object-sculptures, a wider base of collectors could be enticed by more affordably priced editioned prints. And indeed, Castelli's circle made unprecedented use of multiples, first produced by Universal Limited Art Editions and then, beginning in 1969, an in-house graphics studio run by the dealer's second wife Toiny.⁹²

This broadening of the collecting class fit not only with the demographic observations made by the *New York Times* about the new patrons driving the expansion of the gallery circuit, but also with broader social trends. The economic boom of the postwar moment generated an ideal set of opportunities for the makers of formerly elite products to reach new consumers. Ultra-wealthy collectors like Scull were not the only ones to whom experimental art might appeal as shorthand for intellectual sophistication, cultural relevance, and discerning taste. As business historian John McDonough has noted, the post-World War II economy generated a situation in which “money descended on whole new classes of consumers faster than they could cultivate the good taste” required to make sophisticated choices.⁹³ This new good taste was often communicated and cultivated through the medium of advertising, which in the period under consideration frequently drew on the recent history of avant-garde visual art to communicate a message of urbanity and up-to-date sophistication.⁹⁴ In this appropriation, in which the visual arts are used to both inculcate and demarcate the bounds of refinement, McDonough sees a microcosm of the larger history of consumer capitalism,

92. Robert Pincus-Witten and Bruno Bischofberger, *Leo Castelli, Gentle Snapshots: An Exhibition in Honor of the 25th Anniversary of the Leo Castelli Gallery* (Zurich: Galerie Bischofberger, 1982), 47.

93. John McDonough and Karen Egolf, *The Advertising Age Encyclopedia of Advertising* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 474.

94. McDonough and Egolf, *The Advertising Age Encyclopedia of Advertising*, 474.

which moves forward by bringing the status symbols and luxury items of the formerly elite aristocracy into wider circulation for the upper and middle classes. Fittingly, Castelli's gallery was both figuratively and literally located around the corner from Madison Avenue.

But in these rhymes between art and economy—seen here in the shimmering mirage of advertising—it is important to avoid the trap of straightforward determinism. I do not mean to argue that wealth created in the wake of World War II in any way caused the formulation of the art Castelli showed. Rather, these coeval developments become interesting in the ways they can be constructed as mutually informing. The rejection of the existential singularity of Abstract Expressionism dovetails with a new impetus to reach more consumers; as such, the emphasis on quotidian heterogeneity and mass replication emerges as the product of multiple vectors. But from the perspective of the history of art (rather than culture or commerce), such entanglements are all the more compelling when one can detect artistic agency within them. In light of the resonance with the explosion of marketing dollars aiming to reach first-time luxury consumers, one might contend that the artists of Castelli's gallery took these developments a reflexive step further: making the means of advertising circulation and exchange into both the context around as well as the contents within Pop.⁹⁵ Castelli's tactics—stipends, public relations, invested scholarship, appraisal adventurism—aligned with this idiom and were so able to create the linkages to outside stakeholders needed to turn art practice into art history.

Ultimately, Castelli's achievement lies in the manner in which he was able to take a new spate of artistic directions—things that would be called “neo-Dada,” “Pop,” “Minimalism,” and eventually, “Process Art” and “Video Art”—and position them as heirs to the reigning orthodoxy of New York School painting. The success attained by this model is legible in both the now-canonical status of the artists who composed his early rosters, and the network of galleries that sprang up within and around Castelli's wake. Though Castelli is now known for mentoring many of the leading gallerists of the last few decades, including Larry Gagosian and Mary Boone (who will be the subject of chapter 4), Castelli was forging relationship with satellite galleries as early as the 1960s. These would of course include his ongoing coordination with his ex-wife Ileana overseas as well as other, less-well-known relationships with dealers including Janie Lee, David Mirvish, and

95. For more on Pop and advertising, see James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 28.

Margo Leavin.⁹⁶ However, it was Castelli's protégé and collaborator Virginia Dwan who would create the financial model that, second only to Castelli's, would produce the largest imprint on the shape of recent art history. But in contrast with the so-called "Svengali of Pop," Dwan used her gallery to create a financial infrastructure for work that seemed too obdurately massive, or too vanishingly ephemeral, to be sold at all.

96. Andrew M. Goldstein, "How Leo Castelli Remade the Art World," *Artspace* (Feb. 11, 2013), https://www.artspace.com/magazine/art_101/art_market/leo_castellis_legacy-5836 (accessed 11/12/17).

2 ✦ Marketplace of Ideas

Virginia Dwan, Patron of the Impossible

But what is purity? It consists . . . in the composition of an Idea that as such is no longer retained in any bond.

—ALAIN BADIOU, IN *CONDITIONS* (2008)

In the summer of 1960, Leo Castelli took a meeting with an ambitious Los Angeles gallerist named Irving Blum. Blum was in the process of assuming control of the Ferus Gallery, one of the most important outposts of contemporary art in a city that, despite its wealth and engagement in cultural production, supported only a few commercial spaces. Blum understood that to grow the West Coast scene, he needed to take advantage of his network back East. Blum felt strongly that Castelli managed “the most substantial new gallery in New York,” and as he began to strike out on his own with Ferus, he worked assiduously to cultivate that relationship.¹ As Blum was to recall, he approached Castelli with an eagerness bordering on desperation. He explained to Castelli that “I represent a number of artists you’ve never heard of,” but that these unheralded Californians were

1. Paul Cummings, “Oral History Interview with Irving Blum” (1977). Archives of American Art, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-irving-blum-13182> (accessed 2/26/18). It was greatly to Castelli’s benefit that he accepted this meeting. Blum would turn out to be pivotal in helping Castelli rectify the biggest mistake of his career: passing on an as-yet-undiscovered Andy Warhol.



Virginia Dwan in her gallery (1969). (Image courtesy Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.)

“incredibly interested in Jasper.”² Castelli declined Blum’s pressed invitation to show Johns’s paintings, which had already become objects of museum demand, but he assented to pass Blum on to the artist directly. Once in the studio, Blum convinced Johns to participate in an exhibition of his sculpture, to be presented alongside a selection of objects by the great European avant-gardist Kurt Schwitters, which Blum had managed to borrow from a friendly LA collector. The whole episode had an uncanny resonance with Castelli’s tactics: beseeching an established power center for a collaboration that, through a stretched comparison to a vetted European master, would burnish the credentials of a new site of experimentation.

And while *Jasper Johns/Kurt Schwitters* was important as the first westward foray for Castelli’s stable, it was a second exhibition, held only few weeks later, that would mark a history-making partnership for Castelli on the West Coast.³ When *15 of New York* opened at the Dwan Gallery in October 1960, the space was celebrating its one-year anniversary in its off-the-beaten path

2. Quoted in Annie Cohen-Solal, *Leo and His Circle: The Life of Leo Castelli* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 341.

3. For more, see Hunter Drohojowska-Philp, *Rebels in Paradise: The Los Angeles Art Scene and the 1960s* (New York: Henry Holt, 2011), 39–40.

location in west LA. Chosen for its proximity to UCLA (where Dwan's then-husband, Vadim Kondratief, was enrolled in medical school), Dwan was situated miles away from the La Cienega district, anchored by Ferus, that constituted the only meaningful beachhead made by contemporary dealers in Los Angeles. Like Blum, Dwan had sensed the importance of connecting the gallery back to the transformations taking place in New York. She had been showing a program of what might ungenerously be characterized as second-tier Abstract Expressionism, including a number of painters who had briefly passed through Castelli's rotation. *15 From New York* represented a high-water mark for the young gallery, with its largest roster for a group exhibition that included premier artists such as Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Franz Kline.⁴

While the details of their encounter have not been preserved in either of their papers, Dwan and Castelli began working together soon after *15*. In March and April of 1961, they shared the American premier of an exciting French painter named Yves Klein, who had piqued Dwan's curiosity when she encountered his work in Paris.⁵ Klein's work, and the way its conceptual underpinnings dovetailed with Dwan's coalescing gallery program, will be explored in greater depth below, but here it will suffice to characterize his vision as an extraordinarily conceptual take on the basic tenets of abstract painting espoused by the waning New York School. He would, for example, produce uniform canvases covered in his signature ultramarine blue. Visually, these works were in keeping with the monochromes and near-monochromes produced by Ad Reinhardt, Barnett Newman, and Castelli's Robert Rauschenberg. But, as Klein was proud to claim, his formally indistinguishable canvases were suffused with different quantities of invisible conceptual value. And they would need to be priced accordingly.⁶ While many accused Klein of simple hucksterism dressed up in the language of the avant-garde, Klein's operation in good or bad faith is not at issue here. What matters is how at an early moment in the gallery's life, it was set on a course in which what it sold was, at its most basic level, an idea rather than an object.

No doubt, Castelli saw the value in continuing to collaborate with the ascendant Dwan. In the immediate wake of the Klein show, Dwan featured

4. See Virginia Dwan Gallery Archives, Smithsonian American Art Museum (*15 of New York* Exhibition File), as well as James Meyer et al., *Los Angeles to New York: The Virginia Dwan Gallery* (Chicago: National Gallery of Art/University of Chicago Press, 2017), 287–89.

5. Meyer, 289. See also Charles Stuckey, "Oral History Interview with Virginia Dwan" (1984). Archives of American Art.

6. Olivier Berggruen and Nuit Banai, *Yves Klein* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 217.

an exhibition of the work of Castelli artist Salvatore Scarpitta, and then borrowed Robert Rauschenberg's entire solo show in the spring of 1962. Dwan also included Castelli's artists in a number of group exhibitions, most importantly *My Country 'Tis of Thee*, a significant show featuring Johns and Rauschenberg alongside many of the California funk artists, such as Edward Kienholz, who were beginning to move from Ferus's orbit into hers.⁷ As one of the original founders of Ferus (it was his stake that Blum bought to begin his entrée into the gallery), Kienholz's collaboration with Dwan is particularly noteworthy. By the time *My Country 'Tis of Thee* opened in November 1962, Dwan was putting substantial pressure on Ferus's position at the top of the Los Angeles gallery hierarchy. As Blum frankly recalled, "it was very scary, because [Dwan] somehow was interested in a lot of the same people I was interested in. . . . I felt very threatened by her situation."⁸ *America* was already the fifth show held in Dwan's second space, a soaring gallery on Lindbrook Avenue with a custom architectural retrofit designed by Morris Verger, a student of Frank Lloyd Wright.

Through exhibitions conceived in collaboration with Castelli and her own growing roster of connections, Dwan's stable began to stake out its own unassailable position in the American art world. While Castelli (and Ferus) continued to emphasize the object-based idiom of Pop, Dwan's gallery began to reflect and produce the Conceptualist thrust that became one of the most significant trajectories of the decade. Indeed, it is through her circle of artists that one can most clearly observe a critical inflection point in the art history of the period. Dwan was one of a small group of dealers whose artists consistently pushed against the asymptotic limits of art reduced to an immaterial idea. But it was Dwan, virtually alone, who supported this trajectory when it began to turn itself inside out: as interventions in the landscape so obdurately massive they could never be bought, sold, or "owned" in any traditional sense.

This turn to conceptual and then land-based practices has been much rehearsed in the art-historical literature: as the possibilities of Abstract Expressionism seemed increasingly exhausted, artists strained against the delimited world of object-making, of which high modernist painting repre-

7. For his part, Castelli told Paul Cummings in 1969 that Dwan had served as a de facto distributor of premier works for his California-based clients. Paul Cummings, "Oral History Interview with Leo Castelli" (1969). Archives of American Art, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-leo-castelli-12370> (accessed 9/26/20).

8. Cummings, "Oral History Interview with Irving Blum."

sented both a culmination and a terminus.⁹ This straining opened art onto the world of everyday life: the brightly hued, readily digestible imagery of Pop Art, the darker detritus assemblies of Funk–New Realism, and the spatially situated experiments of minimalism all rejected the modernist removal of sacrosanct art from quotidian vulgarity. But soon, even the object form itself (and the attendant container of the white-walled gallery) came to be regarded as limitations to transcend.¹⁰ In the second half of the 1960s, artists began with increasing urgency to pursue ephemeral gestures and immaterial concepts, as well as installations and environments forever rooted in their site specificity. Recondite, text-based works—which might elsewhere be considered a dense kind of concrete poetry—intermixed with huge transpositions of material. Warehouses were filled with dirt or iron oxide dust, holes were cut into ice that transected international boundaries. Inert gas was released into the desert and considered an edge-case sculpture: weightless, invisible, and extraordinarily temporary. Running through this florescence of radical work was a thoroughgoing reconsideration of object and site, a deconstruction that prepared the ground for the interrogation of identity, politics, and power that continues to define criticality in contemporary art.¹¹

But despite the scholarly attention that this evolution has received, a key component of the story has been almost entirely elided. We understand why artists would have pushed away from the object in the way that they did, but there has been almost no exploration of how they could do so. How is it that, growing frustrated by the confining nature of the white-cube gallery, Robert Smithson was able to create monumental (and by extension, monumentally expensive) interventions in the extreme wilds of the Western deserts? And just as essentially, how is it that these willfully remote, difficult-to-access constructions could continue as isolated works of art, rather than simply crumbling back into the deserts from which they were carved? Prior

9. For the authoritative treatment here, see Hal Foster, “The Crux of Minimalism,” in *Return of the Real: The Avant-garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 35–70. See also Yves Alain Bois, “The Task of Mourning,” in *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 229–44.

10. For an excellent period discussion see Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. Originally published as separate essays in *Artforum* and first collected as a book in 1976, these works are best accessed in the 1999 reprint offered by the University of California. For a more historical treatment published contemporaneously with the O’Doherty reissue see Francis Frascina, *Art, Politics and Dissent: Aspects of the Art Left in Sixties America* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1999).

11. See in particular Miwon Kwon, “One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity,” *October* 80 (Spring 1997): 85–110.

nonattention to these sorts of questions points to a tautological bent in the disciplinary framework of art history: a willingness to assume that conceptual discovery drives all else. Behind a worthy idea, institutional, material, and economic factors will more or less fall into line. The overall aim of this book has been to serve as a corrective here: to illuminate the ways in which important shifts in historical art practice were made possible, and shaped by, a concomitant evolution in the financial models that supported them.

Indeed, a more full accounting of the “how” of Land Art points directly back to Dwan—both to the gallery that bore her name and to the litany of well-resourced individuals and institutions that were inspired to build on the work she undertook. As heir to a founder of the 3M corporation, she had enormous financial resources at her disposal—and it has gone strangely under-remarked that Smithsonian and Michael Heizer’s earth-moving projects were paid for with monies derived from a mining fortune. The art-historical literature has noted an isomorphism (or perhaps a conceptual irony) between Land Art and the impulse to resource extraction that literally fueled modernity. However, the field is only now coming to grips with this interrelationship outside of the conceptual: as a product of material relations, economic ties, and institutional self-reproduction.¹² Indeed, many additional pages could be written about this striking case of mimetic patronage—the profits and technologies of mineral extraction sublimated into an artistic medium. However, I want to bracket off questions of Dwan’s psychology—how and why such works appealed to her as an object of support. In the task of turning money into art history, quantity and motivation are far from a sufficient answer. Beyond emotional resonance and conceptual influence, new attention is needed on the coevolution of economic actors and artistic ecosystems.

For example, as this chapter will reveal, the funding infrastructure of

12. This connection to the mining industry through Dwan and 3M has not been a part of the interpretative conversation around Land Art, but the question of the conceptual relationship between geological exploitation for financial and aesthetic value has been raised. The notion that Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* represents a deflecting of the utilitarian logic of modernity into the purposelessness of art-making—vis-à-vis its proximity to the Golden Spike—was a key part of Jennifer Roberts’s foundational *Mirror Travels* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). Moreover, the relationship between Land Art and the contemporaneous rise of the environmental movement has been a focus of recent scholarship. See for example Mark Cheetham, *Landscape into Eco Art: Articulations of Nature Since the '60s* (State College: Penn State University Press, 2018). Finally, the skepticism about the 3M financial connection receives some extended attention in Francesca Russello Ammon, *Bulldozer: Demolition and Clearance of the Postwar Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 261, and Christopher Howard, *The Jean Freeman Gallery Does Not Exist* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019), 301.

Land Art, tied as closely as it was to Dwan's unique situation, conditioned how the work was able to unfold historically. As Dwan held the unusual dual role of both important dealer and de facto key collector, the responsibility for the long-term preservation (and the preservation of access) to works such as *Spiral Jetty* and *Double Negative* fell to her. It was Dwan's pivotal contribution to finance not simply the land lease and physical construction of these objects, but also the ongoing care and public bequest of these works. Indeed, the complexity that arises between the split "ownership" of an immovable work, the land on which it is built, and the materials out of which it is made can only be understood by reference to the thread of Conceptual into Land Art that unfolded through Dwan's gallery. One can perhaps forgive previous art-historical oversight of such complexity that was at once introduced and resolved by Dwan's program. But failure of this resolution would have been historically terminal. A useful contrast can be drawn between Dwan and collector Robert Scull, whose abortive attempts to commission works in the landscape left little physical or scholarly trace. Both provided ample funds, but it was Dwan who inspired and then mobilized a system of patrons, scholars, foundations, and allies to prevent these willfully remote constructions from simply crumbling back into the desert. These ecosystem partners ranged from new organizations created in direct response to the work of Dwan's gallery (such as the Dia Foundation and the Centre d'arts plastiques contemporains) to established art-world powerhouses (e.g., Museum of Contemporary Art—Los Angeles) that expanded their remit in order to "collect" unmovable works located hundreds of miles from their original campuses.

The prevailing rhetoric around Dwan (as well as Howard Wise, to be discussed in the following chapter) has typically charged that their eschewing of profit implies that their impact may be reduced to that of a passive, and thus neutral, source of capital. However, the present and following chapter demonstrate that this view entails missing the forest for the trees. For while not every business model is profit-driven, all such models leave an indelible mark on the ways that works are created, received, and preserved. Castelli represented a new kind of organism—an impresario with a scholarly mien, he concatenated a way to grow value (aesthetic, intellectual, and financial) in real time. Dwan comprises another such novel typology, one with a more subtle, though no less formative, impact on the art made under her aegis. She provided logistical, emotional, institutional, and intellectual support to her artists, inhabiting a singular mix of gallerist, patron, and something

like Hollywood movie producer.¹³ The massively ambitious works produced through her support were addressed to the sweep of civilizational history, an address made plausible only through a tissue of support that she was able to suture together. Just as Castelli's marketing innovations and appraisal manipulations created the possibility for Pop, the Herculean interventions of Land Art would not have been created and continued to exist without Dwan.

THE KLEIN GROUP

Synchronously with the opening of Dwan's *15 of New York*, an important trajectory of experimental practice was gaining critical mass in Paris. On October 27, 1960, a group of assemblage artists signed the "New Realist Manifesto" at the studio of Yves Klein. Written by the group's spokesman, the critic Pierre Restany, the manifesto declared that as "easel painting . . . [was] on its last grandiose breath," it had become imperative to make work out of the physical materials of reality itself.¹⁴ Artists including Klein, Arman, Jean Tinguely, and Niki de Saint Phalle pursued this end through a range of approaches: large-scale mechanical constructions, abstract paintings created through actions such as rifle fire, and provocative installations of everyday objects reframed as art environments.

Klein in particular had already been tightening his work into a proverbial knot of tautological realism for several years. After an itinerant youth that had seen him become, among other things, a professional judo instructor, Klein launched himself into the art world as a painter of monochromes. He quickly settled into a signature visual style anchored by the use of a synthetic ultramarine pigment that he would eventually copyright. The associations were myriad: the venerated tradition of Western painting—distilled down to the metonymic brilliant blue of the Virgin Mary's cloak—collided with the cosmic, totalizing aspiration of the great blue Beyond.¹⁵ Klein's *Monochrome Proposition: Blue Period*—a self-conscious riff on Picasso's famed blue period—opened at a pair of Paris galleries in 1957, including the Iris Clert Gallery. In April of the following year, Klein reduced his pictorial idiom fur-

13. Author interview with Richard Koshalek (October 13, 2020).

14. Quoted in Dorothea Eimert, *Art of the 20th Century* (New York: Parkstone International, 2016), 406.

15. For more see Belinda Recio and Catherine Kouts, *The Essence of Blue* (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 1996), 40.

ther, presenting an empty gallery at the Clert space under the prolix title *The Specialization of Sensibility in the Raw Material State of Stabilized Sensibility*, an exhibition better known simply as *The Void*.

Though Dwan's chance encounter with Klein's monochromes would come in the fall of 1960, the Parisian provocateur was already known to Castelli, a dealer notoriously opportunistic in his search for ways to link his New York stable to contemporary explorations in Europe. Klein's monochromes seem to make him an exceedingly good fit with the brand of "neo-Dada" for which Castelli was building a scholarly scaffolding. As he recounted, "Klein, who was a foreigner, I was really interested in; because, again, there I saw in him a real Dadaist, a man who was able to show an empty room or those blue, blue paintings."¹⁶ Castelli quickly arranged for Klein to participate in a group exhibition, under the appropriately general title *Work in Three Dimensions*, alongside Johns, Rauschenberg, and others. From there, Castelli and Dwan arranged to share Klein's American debut; East and West Coast versions of Klein's first solo exhibition went up in their galleries in April and May 1961.¹⁷ After the Dwan show (a more capacious installation with a greater variety of non-blue work) received a markedly better reception from the critics, Dwan traveled back to Paris, where Klein was eager to introduce her to his wider circle of collaborators. She would go on to feature many of them, including Tinguely, Martial Raysse, and Arman, in her gallery's program.

During this trip, Klein was in correspondence with Dwan's Ed Kienholz about a singular project he was then finalizing.¹⁸ After an exhibition at Iris Clert Gallery had ended with a rancorous dispute, Klein attempted to sever his relationship with the gallery. He acidly informed his ex-dealer that if anyone wanted to acquire his work, they should be told that it was all invisible. When Clert bemoaned this sorry state to the Italian gallerist Peppino Palazzoli, the latter expressed surprising interest in buying an invisible piece. Hoping to mend their relationship, Clert quickly relayed the good news to Klein.¹⁹ This curious episode inspired one of Klein's strangest projects, the

16. Cummings, "Oral History Interview with Leo Castelli" (1969).

17. Castelli and Dwan have offered competing versions of the origins of the split exhibition, with Castelli claiming that he offered the show to Dwan, and Dwan contending that she approached Klein independently. See Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project, "Reminiscence of Virginia Dwan," interview conducted by Sara Sinclair, 204.

18. Meyer et al., *Los Angeles to New York*, 291.

19. Sidra Stich, *Yves Klein* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 1994), 268. See also Berggruen and Banai, *Yves Klein* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 221.

Zones of Immaterial Pictorial Sensibility. By reference to its final form, which was not completely ironed out until the fall of 1962, these “Zones” were immaterial artifacts considered along the lines of his prior empty installation. In typical Kleinian fashion, they were nevertheless available for purchase. What the collector actually received was a kind of claim check that at once assured and undermined the transaction. The sale was confirmed by the receipt, but its written inscription declared the work as yet unfinished. To complete the piece, the collector would be required to meet Klein, receipt in hand, for another ritual exchange on the banks of the Seine. The document, the only extant trace of Klein’s “work,” would be burned, a gesture the artist would reciprocate by throwing gold, equivalent to half of the purchase price, irretrievably into the river.²⁰

As curator James Meyer has observed, this singular, potlatch-like ceremony situates Klein as a master de-materializer. “The exchange of gold for air, of matter for art,” Meyer writes, “had yielded the state of ‘pure immateriality’ that Klein established as the telos of his practice as a young man.”²¹ Indeed, Klein’s *Zones* literalize the alchemy that lies at the heart of painting: the turning of readily available materials into artifacts of extraordinary value. As painting could be configured as a way of turning lead (white) into (figurative) gold, Klein’s *Zones* reify and then elaborate that process. The paint that turned itself into gold turns again into earthen paper, which is then mixed with fire and transformed into air, and then completed by a final return of gold to the depths of the water.

But Klein’s thematic alchemy points to another reality of the state of contemporary art circa 1960. While Dwan and Castelli had the personal means to travel with relative ease between the US and Europe, shipping artworks was then a much more expensive and precarious enterprise.²² This simple reality goes some distance to explain what Robert Pincus Witten and others have observed about Klein, that he was “our first ‘post studio’ artist.”²³ While the model of the itinerant maker—supported by a network of residencies and commissions to produce work *in situ*—has become com-

20. Berggruen and Banai, *Yves Klein*, 25. For more, see Noah Horowitz, *Art of the Deal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 94.

21. Meyer, *Los Angeles to New York*, 42. As Meyer documents, Dwan was in fact on hand to witness a slightly earlier formulation of this ritual.

22. Meyer, *Los Angeles to New York*, 41. This observation is confirmed in the gallery archives for both Dwan and Castelli, which are filled with insurance documentation for works damaged in transit.

23. Quoted in Meyer, *Los Angeles to New York*, 381.

monplace, it was a most unusual arrangement when Dwan put it into practice with Klein's circle of French New Realists. The alignment between an art-historical imperative toward unmediated materials and a financial incentive to move artists rather than artworks made this model a natural fit. Thus, when Dwan needed a major splash to open her new space in the summer of 1962, she invited the artist Arman to come and stay at her guesthouse for several weeks to execute a special project. Additional shows of Niki de Saint Phalle, Jean Tinguely, and others were realized on site with locally sourced materials.

The Tinguely exhibition was especially portentous. As part of Tinguely's visit to the West, NBC Broadcasting arranged to document one of his iconic self-destroying machines play out its doomed existence in the Nevada wilderness. The location clearly demonstrated the redolent possibilities of the Mojave as a testing ground for the limits of the work of art, but the foreshadowing did not stop at the edge of civilization.²⁴ Even once situated back in Los Angeles, Dwan and Tinguely organized an unusual framework for his exhibition, including a series of mechanical fountains placed on the lawns of local collectors. This multiply-sited show was to be accompanied by a champagne-soaked tour that took patrons from fountain to fountain. As Dwan remarked years later, "perhaps that was the first time that the gallery was to extend its viewing space beyond its walls. There would be Earth art later."²⁵ Dwan's passive construction is crucial; by locating the transition in the art, she elides her own formative role as director of the venue within which these innovations unfolded. Said more pointedly, the confluence of the Dwan Gallery's many historical and financial rivulets—idea-based production, site-specific commissions, interventions in the remote desert—would go on to carve epochal changes in subsequent art history.

MINIMALS, CONCEPTUALS, AND MODELS

This heady nexus had already placed Dwan at the forefront of ideas then unfolding back in New York. While Castelli had worked tirelessly to posi-

24. See Pamela Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time and Art in the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 141. See also Joshua Shannon, "Matter: Art in the Desert," in *The Recording Machine: Art and Fact During the Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 67–106. Shannon is particularly authoritative on the interrelationship between Conceptual Art and the unfolding dynamics of Cold War science.

25. Meyer, *Los Angeles to New York*, 245.

tion “neo-Dada” and Pop as collector-friendly successors to the austere abstraction of high modernism, a different, more hermetic reply was taking shape in the studios of Lower Manhattan. Though artists such as Donald Judd, Tony Smith, and Robert Morris all theorized their projects differently, they shared a commitment to stringent, modular geometric forms arrayed throughout the real space of the gallery. Exhibitions such as *Black White and Grey* (Wadsworth Atheneum, 1964) and *Primary Structures* (Jewish Museum, 1966) pointed to the ascendance of sleek spatialized constructions that rejected not just the expressionist bravura of New York School painting but the delimited frame of painting itself. While Judd’s wall-mounted “specific objects” were designed to specifically transcend the binary of painting and sculpture, Robert Morris’s room-sized installations emphasized the perceptual and proprioceptive possibilities of viewers moving through space.

Robert Morris became the first exemplar of this new mode of working in the Castelli gallery. Morris had shown his first grouping of flat, gray, rectangular plywood constructions at the Green Gallery in 1964, an exhibition often described as the first exhibition of “minimal sculpture.” The Green Gallery was a short-lived experimental space run by Richard Bellamy with financial backing from Robert Scull. When the hard-nosed Scull failed to see a fast-enough return, he pulled his backing, and Castelli was ideally positioned to absorb many Green castoffs.²⁶ The timing was fortuitous. Castelli was coming to feel that Pop Art had perhaps passed its heyday, and just as he had positioned his first cohort as the successors to the New York School, it was coming time to write the next chapter. As Castelli recounted, “I spoke to Jasper about what he felt, and he said that obviously I had to take Morris. I had almost gotten Morris at an earlier stage. . . . Then, as far as Judd was concerned, I knew that Stella liked him very much.”²⁷ While Morris would eventually ascend into a leadership position in Castelli’s circle, his first post-Green show was not in fact with Castelli but rather at Dwan’s venue in Los Angeles. For his solo show in March 1966, Morris exhibited a series of fiberglass constructions—more curvilinear, but derived from the same regularized, geometric vocabulary as his breakout exhibition at Green from two years prior.

Important shifts were underway for Dwan as well. In 1964, Dwan became a backer of the Park Place Gallery, another short-lived experimental

26. Catherine Dossin, *The Rise and Fall of American Art, 1940s–1980s: A Geopolitics of Western Art* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 163.

27. Paul Cummings, “Oral History Interview with Leo Castelli” (1969).

space that had opened in the rough warehouse districts of lower Manhattan.²⁸ The arrangement itself was noteworthy in several respects. First, the Park Place venue would come to serve as a springboard for many of the more adventurously conceptual responses to “minimalism,” responses that occurred at the level of creation, display, and execution. While future Dwan mainstays including Michael Heizer, Carl Andre, Robert Smithson, and Sol LeWitt all participated in important exhibitions, Park Place directors Paula Cooper and John Gibson would go on to create commercial spaces that supported the careers of these figures for decades to come. And Dwan’s fellow board member, J. Patrick Lannan, would also be an important ally and funding source for a number of Dwan-related projects. Indeed, Lannan’s involvement throws into relief the oddness of Dwan’s participation on the board (an arrangement in which she agreed to pay yearly dues for a fixed number of works). She was the only participant who ran a commercial venue of her own. Her unique, dual role as both collector and dealer would come to define the parameters of her pivotal support of Land Art, and it is only apt that her foothold in the New York gallery world came first in the role of patron.

But when Park Place folded in 1967, Dwan had already been operating a New York space for over a year, an expansion that marked the first Los Angeles gallery to open a satellite location back in the world headquarters of New York. Her chosen site was appropriately in the middle of the action: just over a mile from Castell’s gallery on 77th and practically around the corner from the MoMA. But even before opening her doors on 57th Street, Dwan had an artist in mind for her first season. As Sol LeWitt remembers their first encounter, “She saw the show at the Daniels Gallery [his first career solo show], and she called me up and came up here, and she bought a piece, and then she called up the next week and asked if I wanted to do a show. . . . She asked me in February for a show in May, and I didn’t have any work. . . . I just decided that I had about three months, and I worked really very hard.”²⁹ LeWitt’s first Dwan exhibition, and second career solo show, took a page from the same idiom as Morris’s nearly synchronous exhibition with Dwan LA—elementary constructions covered in uniform, achromatic paint.

And while Morris had his own connections to the world of avant-

28. Linda Henderson, *Reimagining Space: The Park Place Gallery Group in 1960s New York* (Austin, TX: Blanton Museum of Art, 2009), 11.

29. Paul Cummings, “Oral History Interview with Sol LeWitt.” Archives of American Art Oral History Project, conducted in 1974; accessible at <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-sol-lewitt-12701> (accessed 2/27/18).

garde music, LeWitt's *Serial Project*, first shown at Dwan in May 1966, foregrounded his engagement with the ideas of serialist composers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen and Milton Babbitt.³⁰ Building on innovations introduced by Arnold Schoenberg, these serialists deconstructed expected musical structures around key signatures and modal development in order to replace them with algorithmic parameters for note groupings and instrumentation. LeWitt was especially interested in the serialist tenet of permutation to exhaustion, in which the exposition of every possible configuration of a given set of forms would determine the overall structure of a work. In his art, LeWitt turned these ideas against the grain of their intended usage. What had been designed as a method to maximize authorial command morphed into a freestanding system that obviated the need for any creativity whatsoever. As LeWitt wrote in his companion statement, "He would follow his predetermined premise to its conclusion avoiding subjectivity. . . . The serial artist does not attempt to produce a beautiful or mysterious object but functions merely as a clerk cataloging the results of his premise."³¹ Such results-cataloging is illustrated by *Serial Project*: open and solid cubes and rectangles permuted into every possible combination on an eleven-by-eleven grid.³²

While Klein's brief participation in Dwan's program had pointed in this direction, it was through shows of LeWitt and Morris that this idiom of austere geometries and complex conceptual programatics became the vision, or perhaps the brand, of the Dwan Gallery. The apex for this particular inflection came in the exhibition that succeeded LeWitt's breakout show. The title, *10*, clearly casts the association with mathematical rigidity and its refusal of easy critical interpretation. As Dwan herself explained, "so much has been written about 'Primary Structures,' 'ABC Art,' 'Reductive Art' . . . not one of the artists participating in '*10*' will identify himself with these terms."³³ In place of these rubrics, Dwan suggested that the modular constructions on view be read on something like their own tautological qualities,

30. For a larger discussion of LeWitt and Serialism, see chapter 2 of Michael Maizels, *In and Out of Phase: An Episodic History of Art and Music in the 1960s* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020).

31. Sol LeWitt, "Serial Project No. 1," *Aspen* 5/6 (1966): section 17; easily accessed online at <http://artype.de/Sammlung/Bibliothek/1/LeWitt/Serial%20Project.htm> (accessed 9/11/15).

32. In her extended interview with historian Charles Stuckey, Dwan recounts the sales complexities introduced by LeWitt's rules, which would only permit certain groupings of objects to be sold together. "Interview with Virginia Dwan" (1984). Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

33. See "10" in Dwan Gallery Exhibition Files, Archives of American Art.

“non-expressionistic . . . impersonal, without mystique, empathy or readable content.” And indeed, *10* was comprised of geometric metal constructions, near-monochrome canvases, and other visually laconic forms produced by LeWitt, Morris, Judd, and others, such as Jo Baer and Agnes Martin, who until recently have been overlooked by scholarship in large part because of their gender. Perhaps the most significant participant, Robert Smithson, was new to Dwan’s program as of this exhibition.

While the following sections will have much more to say about Dwan’s advocacy for Smithson, the gallery circle was quickly pushing beyond the gallery-bound phenomenological experimentation that characterized the *10* idiom. Most visibly, the notion of a system or concept ascending to a place of quasi-authorship was becoming increasingly important to LeWitt. In the summer of 1967, LeWitt published “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,” a manifesto text that has become a milestone in the history of postwar American art. In this essay, he boiled his project down to its most pithy formulation. “In conceptual art,” he wrote, “the idea becomes a machine that makes the art.”³⁴ This now-canonical formulation of Conceptual Art (it was this essay that coined the term) must be understood as just one part of the development of Dwan’s larger program. “I’m interested in the ideas,” Dwan would tell an interviewer in 1970, “and I personally take a great deal of pleasure seeing the ideas brought out to other people. That is one of my major concerns in having the gallery.”³⁵ But what could something like this mean in practice? How could one run a gallery the primary focus of which would be the distribution of ideas rather than objects? Dwan’s artists would offer many answers to this question over the next several years: Kienholz would create a *Concept Tableaux* with distinct resonances of Klein’s ineffable works, and Lee Lozano would offer a kind of tip jar that dematerialized the results of an earlier painting.³⁶ However, the most immediate formulation of Dwan’s exhibitions of concepts would entail a spate of shows featuring artifacts that

34. Sol LeWitt, “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,” reprinted in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists’ Writings*, eds. Kristine Stiles and Peter Howard Selz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 822–26. In this essay, LeWitt is also dismissive of the notion of an umbrella minimalism.

35. See Elayne Varian transcript of interview with Virginia Dwan in Exhibition Records of the Contemporary Wing of the Finch College Museum of Art, Archives of American Art. Varian conducted interviews with a range of leading gallerists, including Castelli, Dwan, and Howard Wise, in the leadup to her article “New Dealing,” *Art in America* 8 (January–February 1970): 68–73. Varian’s unpublished interview transcripts are included in her papers given to the Archives of American Art.

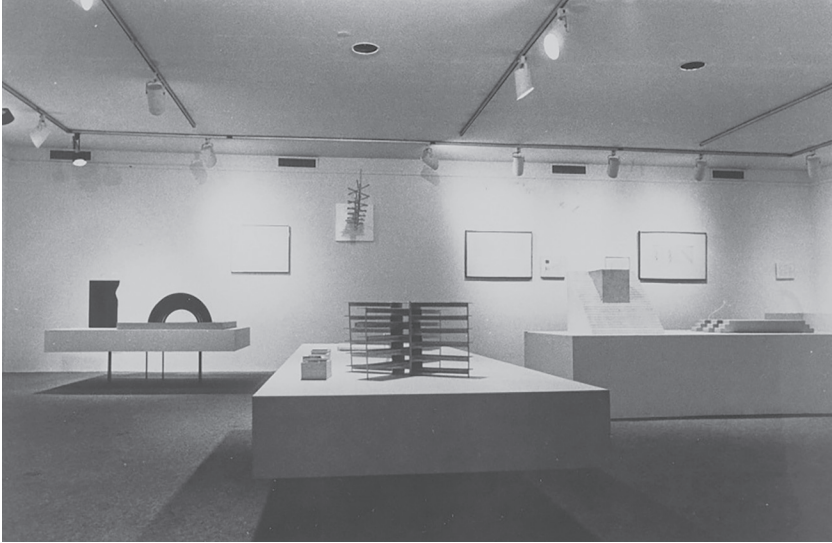
36. Meyer, *Los Angeles to New York*, 85.

only pointed elsewhere—maquettes for yet unrealized projects, or as texts reconsidered as gallery objects themselves.

Prior to the innovations of Conceptual Art (or one might argue, the provocations of Marcel Duchamp), a straightforward division can be described between the ideational content of a work of art and the physical materials out of which it is made. One could acquire a Monet landscape, and while one might be interested in Monet's notions about color, or art-historical ascriptions of the disappearing pastoral, one would still be acquiring the physical thing—the canvas, the stretcher bars, the paint. The ideas come with, and indeed cannot seem to live apart from, their substrate material. Thus, when artists started to prise apart this entanglement, two sorts of strategies presented themselves. The first, already hinted at, would involve making the idea ever more independent of the materials in which it is realized. While deployed differently, this same strategic approach unites Yves Klein—with his differently valued, visibly indistinguishable monochromes—and Robert Morris, who was keen to emphasize that his works were more like props for an open-ended play enacted by viewers, not precious artifacts in their own right. It is this mode that summed up Sol LeWitt's insistence that the "idea be the machine that makes the art." The core concept might lead to any number or configuration of subsidiary physical objects.

But it would be equally possible to throw one's artistic weight onto the opposite balance. Rather than making works ever freer from material form, one might attempt to subject ineffable ideas to the rigors of material existence. A paradigmatic example of this approach can be seen in the work of Mel Bochner, a frequent interlocutor of LeWitt's and Smithson's who also became a mainstay at Dwan. In a 1970 group show in Dwan's Los Angeles space, Bochner covered a wall with large splotches of chalkboard paint, dripping down to the floor to emphasize its viscous materiality. Within the paint, Bochner scrawled the simple, enigmatic sentence "LANGUAGE IS NOT TRANSPARENT." Indeed, this piece was in part a reply to LeWitt, with Bochner claiming an almost political resistance to the imputed weightlessness of words and ideas. Against the Heideggerian faith in unmediated linguistic essence, and against the McLuhanesque techno-utopianism premised on frictionless communication, Bochner insisted that ideas and their expression in words be read as inherently tied into their physical, material affordances.³⁷

37. Bochner's linguistic materialism was the focus of an exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago in 2007. See Johanna Burton, *Mel Bochner: Language, 1966–2006* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2007).



Scale Models and Working Drawings installation view (1967). (Image courtesy Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.)

While the approaches of hypo- and hyper-materialization were inherently intermingled in Dwan's program, the end of the 1960s saw the thrust of the galleries' program change from an alignment with the first to the second strategy. Dwan's *Scale Models and Working Drawings*, which opened in January 1967, demonstrates how the maximal realization of dematerialization contained within itself the seeds of a pendulum swing to the opposite pole. The show, as Dwan explained, was to be radically idea-based, with the things on display emphatically not constituting the work itself. The real art was "outside the gallery"; what was on view would be "showing one thing, but pointing towards another."³⁸ While Judd and Morris presented traditional sketches and models, the younger artists in Dwan's orbit depicted grand, even impossible projects, many of which were conceived of as "taking place" far beyond the walls. Michael Steiner proposed encasing a mountain in concrete, and Walter de Maria provided renderings for walls sited far out in the Western desert. Robert Smithson, who would become a leader in realizing this sort of work, presented a maquette for a viscous environmental sculpture: a tar pit enclosed in gravel.³⁹

This turning to the (dematerialized) model provides a neat counterpoint

38. Quoted in Meyer, *Los Angeles to New York*, 307.

39. "Scale Models" exhibition files, Virginia Dwan papers, Archives of American Art.

for a group of subsequent exhibitions organized by Dwan, LeWitt, and Smithson. By contrast with what he described as the “essentially ideational quality” popular among Conceptual artists, Smithson wanted to consider “language as a material entity . . . information which has a kind of physical presence.”⁴⁰ The resulting series, *LANGUAGE to be LOOKED at and/or THINGS to be READ*, the last of which featured the viscous Bochner wall painting described above, exemplified the hyper-materialist approach. Between them, the shows featured an impressive roster of participant artists; a 1915 text work from Marcel Duchamp anchored the exhibition historically, and a range of contemporaneous approaches to language were represented. Rauschenberg, Morris, and Johns represented the Castelli stable, while less-well-known artists, including On Kawara, Arakawa, Hannah Weiner, and Naomi Dash, presented iterations of calendars, scientific data sets, concrete poems, and other heterogenous reifications of linguistic abstractions. As Smithson explained in the series press release, “Here, language is built not written.” Smithson’s own contribution spoke to the processes of material creation and destruction. His *Pulverization* (1967), and the related *Heap of Language* (1966), consider words as subject to the erosive forces of geological transformation.

This sense of language having been turned into substance that partakes of the world rather than the mind actually brings us back to the beginnings of this trajectory at Dwan. Indeed, Smithson’s acts of lexical demolition form a counterpoint to the contractual alchemy performed by Klein on the banks of the Seine.⁴¹ The words written on Klein’s claim checks were not merely incinerated; they had the power, in their own destruction, to catalyze further transformations on an alchemical and a literal, financial level. Pace Dwan, artworks were distilled down to a pure concept, and concepts then reified back into a heap of words. The point is pivotal. Latent in early conceptual gestures, no matter how earnestly ethereal, was the promise of the massive earth-moving that Dwan was to make possible. As a young artist, Klein had attempted to sign the entirety of the night sky as a cosmological version of a Duchampian found object.⁴² And though he passed away shortly after his exchanges with Dwan, the dealer he inspired would make it possible to move earth, if not heaven, in the name of art.

But something even more fundamental than artistic influence or con-

40. Cummings, “Oral History Interview with Robert Smithson.”

41. For more on this topic see Robert Samek, “Performative Utterances and the Concept of Contract,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 43, no. 2 (2006): 196–210.

42. Berggruen and Banai, *Yves Klein*, 29.

ceptual symmetry is at stake here. Namely, Smithson and Klein's work with the material dimensions of language positions their practice as a kind of corollary to Dwan's endeavors as a gallery director. For her artists, words imaginatively took on the properties of minerals: language to be looked at, and then pulverized, or perhaps burned in order to be transformed back into gold. But it was Dwan who was responsible for turning these recondite, paper-based explorations into the "gold" with which her artists could be paid. And this hidden resonance raises the most fundamental question of all. If Castelli's stable both produced and was produced by the economic machinations of its director, what were the financial parameters of Dwan's program that enabled it to generate a body of work as deeply, abstrusely conceptual as it did?

SHOW ME THE MONEY

It is at this juncture that Dwan's familial and financial background must be addressed. Before beginning, it is important to note a singular reticence on Dwan's part to discuss the financial dimensions of her operations. During an authoritative, eleven-hour oral history about her program, she flatly corrected her interviewer, reminding him, "You can't ask me price questions." Importantly, Dwan's receipts and financial records have not yet been made accessible to researchers, a lacuna that her representatives assured the author would be filled in the coming years. Nevertheless, important lessons lurk in the information that is available. First, it is a matter of public record that, as the granddaughter of 3M Corporation cofounder John Dwan, Virginia began her gallery ventures with considerable resources at her disposal. She was heir to a fortune valued at just over \$22.5 million in 1961, or almost \$200 million in 2020-adjusted dollars.⁴³ This extraordinary wealth provided broad latitude for dealing with the commercial side of the business, an aspect of gallery work that never appealed to Dwan. "It was the business of art that didn't interest me," she recalled in 1970, "I was an untalented salesperson."⁴⁴ And while she was well liked by the artists she represented, they also noted her lack of enthusiasm for sales. As LeWitt described her typical demeanor, "She would be there; she would never try to coerce anyone. If they wanted

43. Jessica Dawson, "Whatever Happened to Virginia Dwan?" *X-Tra* 14, no. 2 (Winter 2011), <http://x-traonline.org/article/whatever-happened-to-virginia-dwan/> (accessed 2/27/18).

44. Varian, transcript of interview with Virginia Dwan.

to buy something, she would sell it to them.”⁴⁵ Dwan’s behavior formed a striking contrast with that of Castelli, whose hard-selling would have been well known to Dwan’s crew of young artists. And while Dwan was fortunate to hire John Weber as a business manager, it must be acknowledged that her gallery was neither designed nor run as a money-making venture.

This situation has led many to conclude that financial considerations did not impact the Dwan Gallery program, or Land Art more generally. This argument has often been repeated. To choose one pointed example, in “Land Artists and Art Markets,” economists Victor Ginsburg and A. F. Penders contend that, because the immobile constructions of Land Art have borne out comparatively little volume on the resale market, “Land artists have not been as successful as [conceptual and minimal] artists.”⁴⁶ Bracketing out the ostensible ease with which these interrelated modes of practice could be separated (as well as the facile equation of market transactions with artistic success), these economists nevertheless rehash a belief powerfully articulated by artist Michael Heizer himself. As Heizer explained to an interviewer in 1971, “there are no values attached to something like this because it’s not portable, and not a malleable barter/exchange object . . . it’s not worth anything.”⁴⁷ But when Ginsburg, Penders, and Heizer point to the spatial fixity of interventions in the landscape as evidence for their “worthlessness,” artists and economists alike perform a sleight of hand. Their resistance to resale and mobility does not entail that the icons of Land Art be without value, nor does such resistance imply a lack of economically interesting features in the ecosystem. Rather, if we want to understand how financial considerations influenced this kind of work, we must look beyond exchange valuations: at how these things came to be made, and how they have since changed hands without moving through the standard sales channels.

First, let us address what we might describe as the business model of the Dwan Gallery. Following Castelli, Dwan put her artists on a regular stipend, and thus her emerging artists, who are rarely financially motivated at such early moments in their careers, were unlikely to be perturbed by her lack of enthusiasm for salesmanship. But, as she was quick to point out, the territory into which her gallery was moving was largely uncharted. For example, Castelli’s artists (mostly) worked in traditional, low-cost materials such as paint on canvas. But interventions in the landscape presented a whole dif-

45. Cummings, “Oral History Interview with Sol LeWitt.”

46. V. Ginsburgh and A. F. Penders, “Land Artists and Art Markets,” *Journal of Cultural Economics* 21 (1997): 222.

47. James Crump, *Troublemakers: The Story of Land Art* (film, 2015), at 9:51.

ferent scope of endeavor, and her funds were needed to cover not only an artist's living expenses but also the vastly more expensive fabrication of their work. Dwan explained that she encouraged her artists to approach her with grand visions, and "if we agree in most cases that it is very important, we try to make sure that it is accomplished."⁴⁸ Comparatively few formal budgets survive in her archives, but fabrication costs must have quickly grown exorbitant. In a public lecture shortly before his death, Smithson quoted the figure of \$9,000 just for the construction of the Spiral Jetty (about \$50,000 in 2020-adjusted figures).⁴⁹ Other accounts have put Dwan's contribution to *Double Negative* at \$67,000, nearly half a million when adjusted for contemporary inflation.⁵⁰

But Dwan's arrangement of paying for the fabrication of works created a more acute version of a ubiquitous situation. For the entire epoch during which galleries have sold the work of living artists, the question of what should be done with new, unsold creations has plagued dealers everywhere. While unwanted inventory can be a major problem if one relies on incoming sales to pay artists and gallery staff, we have seen that this was not a hurdle for Dwan (which is already itself notable). But even without fears over bills, the question remains of what should actually happen to unsold, expensively manufactured creations? Castelli spoke candidly with an interviewer in 1970 about this exact scenario, explaining that, in standard gallery practice, fronting the fabrication cost would give default ownership of objects to the gallery. To resolve this issue, one of two things would typically happen.⁵¹ Either the creator would purchase the piece himself (paying the gallery back out of his stipend for material cost only), or the gallery owner would buy the piece from the artist at 50 percent of its retail price—in which the artist would be left with the same 50 percent as if it had sold to an external collector. The latter, seemingly more desirable option entails a hidden complication. The purchasing gallery owner inadvertently creates a financial incentive to sell an artwork he owns outright, and so cannibalize the next sale of an artist he represents. And with a new lost sale, the stale inventory problem is all the more likely to repeat itself.

48. Varian, transcript of interview with Virginia Dwan.

49. Pat Cunningham, "Symposium: On Visual Arts," *The Lantern* (Ohio State student newspaper), April 5, 1973.

50. William Fox, *Michael Heizer: The Once and Future Monuments* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2019), 93.

51. Elayne Varian, transcript of interview with Leo Castelli in Exhibition Records of the Contemporary Wing of the Finch College Museum of Art, Archives of American Art.

While they form an important backdrop as industry norms, these two options would have meant little in practice to the operations of the Dwan Gallery. Artists relied on Dwan's largesse to fund large projects, and their regular stipends were nowhere near sufficient to cover such costs even on the "layaway" model. Moreover, no conflict from owning the works of her artists would have emerged from Dwan, for whom sales were almost an afterthought. And thus a third aspect of the financial framework of the Dwan world comes into focus: it was primed to itself acquire title to an unusually high number of works that its program was generating. Dwan herself acknowledged this in 2011, telling historian Charles Stuckey that "the amount of art that I had when I closed was somewhat predicated on the fact that I had given money to the artists [on stipend], who in turn had given me works of art. . . . I ended up with more than they did."⁵² While Dwan was here referring to physical objects, like those in the *Scale Models* show, the same paradigm governed her engagement with land-based works, all the more so given the complexities around securing the land rights needed to ensure a work's long-term survival. As she recounted, Smithson's wife Nancy Holt, an important Land artist in her own right, had been preoccupied with "writing to various chambers of commerce and asking them if they had any land available . . . would they be willing to donate it . . . could it be leased?"⁵³ Dwan would go on to provide pivotal support in this area to numerous artists in her stable.

It is in light of these arrangements that Dwan's liminal role as both dealer and collector emerges as absolutely critical. Like Castelli, Dwan worked assiduously, if more quietly, to be the architect of an historical narrative for the work of her gallery. This narrative, as we have seen, was apt to be written by the theoretically inclined artists in her orbit (namely Smithson, LeWitt, and Bochner), rather than mercenary academics. And like Castelli, it fell to Dwan as dealer to ensure that works arrived into the hands of worthy allies—individual benefactors as well as esteemed institutions that could validate, historicize, and preserve works as the cement on canonization hardened in real time. But here, as patron herself, Dwan was in a comparatively advantageous situation. As she came to own the works her gallery was opened to represent, she was able to orchestrate a multidecade period of institutional giving that no other dealer could even dare to dream of.

52. Stuckey, "Virginia Dwan Oral History" (2011).

53. Stuckey, "Virginia Dwan Oral History" (1984).

At the most fundamental level, economics conditions art by changing the parameters of the possible. Castelli's model enabled long-term viability of a new kind of work: heterogeneous object-collage, multiply iterated Pop series, museum art produced by young Americans. This enablement stemmed from programmatic and economic changes: it was no longer necessary to worry about the creation of a scholarly record, or to wait for the museum complex to recognize avant-garde evolution in hindsight. Compensation plans could be reimagined to incentivize work in multiple. And of course value could be unlocked from very young artists by a brazen willingness to flout legal and ethical norms concerning the appraisal of artworks. Similarly, Dwan's program economics enlarged the sphere of the possible, removing constraints. Her stable was free to work without concern for the cost of fabrication, the likelihood of sale, the intermediate state of collections maintenance, or the long trajectory of institutional acceptance. Without these new freedoms, the iconic works of Smithson, Heizer, De Maria, and others could not have existed in the form in which we recognize them.

OUT INTO THE LAND

Indeed, Dwan's most impactful mark on art history came through her support of what she called Earthworks: massive land-based projects that often incorporated vast acreages, many tons of materials, and months or years of construction. It is important to note that Dwan's circle was far from alone here: feminist artists such as Judy Chicago and Ana Medieta sought to recover timeless conceptions of nature and Womanhood repressed by patriarchy, while international groups such as the Mono-ha collective explored interconnections between remote landscape, elementary forms, and primeval construction. However, we must return to the story of three white men already the subject of copious literature because the icons produced by each of them—Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970), Heizer's *Double Negative* (1969), and De Maria's *Lightning Field* (1974/76)—were made possible by the resources Dwan put at their disposal. And as this, at its core, is a story about how resources have conditioned and constructed the canon, we must here revisit the origin story of these already well-known works.

For Smithson, who maintained a long-standing interest in geology, the impetus for earth-scaping artworks initially sprang from a failure. In 1966, a representative from the architectural firm of Tibbetts, Abbot, McCarthy, and Stratton approached Smithson about serving as an artist-consultant to

a large-scale project at the Dallas–Fort Worth Airport. He invited Smithson to propose interventions for a new terminal that, in contemporary press accounts, was compared to the building project of the Pyramids at Giza.⁵⁴ Smithson invited his fellow Dwan artists Robert Morris and Sol LeWitt to join him in submitting proposals for appropriately ambitious sculptural works; Morris’s was characteristically grandiose, and LeWitt’s was predictably tongue-in-cheek. None of these projects was realized, in no small part because the firm lost its contract with the airport authority. However, the experience awakened Smithson to the realization that the scale and the vision of art-making could be expanded vastly beyond what had been pursued by individual modern artists. But only under the right circumstances and armed with the right resources.

Following the airport interlude, Smithson began publishing a number of historically significant essays that, taken together, form the theoretical bedrock for decades worth of subsequent scholarship. The best known is probably “The Monuments of Passaic,” an irony-soaked travelogue to the exurbs of Smithson’s native northern New Jersey.⁵⁵ As the piece relates, Smithson maintained that the state of erosion and decay—on both a civilizational and a geological scale—was a default condition, and the poetics of anticipating inevitable ruination became the primary subject of his work for the remainder of his life. This article also contains the first usage of the term “Earthworks,” which Dwan eventually took up as the unifying appellation. The phrase was actually quoted by Smithson from an advertisement for an artificial soil.⁵⁶ This origin throws into sharp relief the tenor of his larger vision—an attempt to see the artifacts and impulses of civilization through the wrong end of a temporal telescope.

Shortly after “Monuments” appeared in print, Smithson took Dwan and a small group of other artists, including LeWitt, Holt, and the emerging sculptor/Land artist Mary Peacock, out on road trip to the same territory in New Jersey. The trip was designed to work through a new concept—an intervention in a physical location and its translation from the “real world”

54. For more, see Janna Eggebeen, “Between Two Worlds: Robert Smithson and Aerial Art,” *Public Art Dialogue* 1, no. 1 (2011): 87–111.

55. Ann Reynolds and Robert Smithson, *Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 92–96.

56. Robert Smithson, “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey,” reprinted in Jack Flam, ed., *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 72.

into the blankness of the gallery.⁵⁷ He took the group to an abandoned airstrip whose axial positioning he was intending to play off of within a subsequent structure built from Dwan's gallery. The finished work, *Nonsite* (1968), contained a floor-bound series of metal bins whose visual vocabulary was closely connected to that of Morris and LeWitt. But new to the mix, the configuration and orientation of the bins referred back to the "site" of the runway: the longitudinal and latitudinal lines drawn on a map would generate the segments that Smithson produced in his sculptural forms.

In the years of 1966–67, Smithson's ideas about a new language of earthen monumentality were emerging in independent parallelism with two other West Coast–based artists. From his days in the experimental art scene in Northern California, Walter De Maria had gotten to know Robert Morris as well as the composer La Monte Young, an enormously influential and self-aggrandizing figure who has claimed, among other things, to have been "the best drug connection in New York."⁵⁸ Young developed an aggressively experimental approach to music, which centered on orchestrating resonance between human and natural sounds. These drone pieces grew in duration from minutes, to hours, to days, and to eventually, years of near-total sonic invariance in *The Dream House*. Out of this heady milieu, De Maria developed a set of artistic concerns with notable similarities to Smithson's. Both became interested in a speculative reimagining of the received relationship between cartographic constructs and the territory they typically describe at a remove.⁵⁹ In De Maria's case, these were begun by drawing lines on maps as a way to imagine enormous earthbound structures, such as a line drawn on a map that proposed a three-mile linear edifice constructed in the wilds of the Sahara Desert.⁶⁰

De Maria joined the Dwan Gallery in 1967, and that same year Robert Smithson took his first trip out west, scouting for locations in Nevada with the famously reclusive Michael Heizer. While Smithson might have had any

57. The conceptual problematics of the exhibition gallery as void-place, or a "white cube" in the contemporary parlance, has been a major concern for artists and writers since the 1960s. The most authoritative treatment of the subject is Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

58. Rob Tannenbaum, "Minimalist Composer La Monte Young on His Life and Immeasurable Influence," *Vulture* (July 2015), <http://www.vulture.com/2015/06/la-monte-young-dream-house.html> (accessed 2/27/18).

59. For more on this topic, see Michael Maizels, "The New Geography: Earth Music and Land Art, Version 2.0," *Art Journal Open* (January 2015), <http://artjournal.collegeart.org/?p=5857> (accessed 2/27/18).

60. Meyer, *Los Angeles to New York*, 310.

number of projects in mind, Heizer was beginning the groundwork for an enormous series entitled *9 Nevada Depressions* (1968). The *Depressions* are significant not only for their size—a single one in the series of nine involved moving 3,000 pounds of earth from a remote lake bed—but also for the economic considerations behind them. An independent artist such as Heizer would never have had the resources to create something on this scale, and in fact the financing for the project came, somewhat surprisingly, from Robert Scull. Best known as a collector (and tax dodger) of Pop Art, Scull financed land projects because, as Castelli explained it, “it is his idea that he wants to go on being involved in every possible thing that occurs in the field of art.”⁶¹ Beyond the revealing psychological observation, the Pop magnate’s involvement in the world of Land Art points to the hidden threads linking the disparate corners of the art world. Notwithstanding the differences between Castelli’s market-driven approach and Dwan’s quixotic idealism, a limited network of wealthy patrons constructed these two approaches as mutual informing. Once Castelli succeeded in forging links between high-dollar patrons and young, ambitious American artists, the ramifications would quickly overflow the program of any one gallery.

In the fall of 1968, the nascent “Earthworks” movement began to fully coalesce. Smithson, by now fully ascended into the role of the group’s spokesman, published “Sedimentation of the Mind,” an associational manifesto that framed Land Art’s emergence from Conceptual Art along the lines of hypo- and hyper-materialism rehearsed above. Just a few weeks after, De Maria executed the movement’s most ambitious indoor project, an installation of fifty cubic meters of dirt at a gallery owned by the Munich-based Heiner Friedrich, who will become an important character in the conclusion of the present chapter. And finally, at the encouragement of De Maria, the formerly independent Michael Heizer made his way to Dwan. He showed up unannounced with a bundle of photographs of *9 Nevada Depressions*, and Dwan recalls that she was “astounded” by Heizer, explaining that “this young person had done these major works without any sort of institutional support . . . that kind of integrity and courage is extremely rare.”⁶² While Scull’s backing made such a project possible, Dwan was not mistaken in seeing in Heizer an artist willing to brave isolation and physical hardship to create visionary, and monumental, works of art.

These threads came together in Dwan’s *Earthworks*, which took place

61. Cummings, “Oral History Interview with Leo Castelli.”

62. Quoted in Meyer, *Los Angeles to New York*, 311.

in October 1968 and seems to have been the first exhibition organized around this theme in any gallery or museum.⁶³ A variety of approaches to this topic were represented: Robert Morris presented a largely uninflected pile of detritus under the eponymous title *Earthwork*, while Michael Heizer sent in documentation related to the *9 Nevada Depressions*. LeWitt also sent documentation, of a quasi-performance work for which he had buried a cube at the behest of a Dutch collector. Robert Smithson presented another iteration of his prior *Nonsite*, creating a new configuration of modular, floor-bound tubs filled with mineral ores from the Franklin Furnace Mines in New Jersey. Dwan had in fact attempted to find land in New Jersey for a site-specific project, but unable to secure access to a suitable location, she defaulted back to “very definitely our last choice,” holding the show in the gallery.⁶⁴ While photography and other documentary modes would become increasingly important to the reception and distribution of this way of working, attending to the frustration here is important: it points to how identifying and securing ongoing access to sites in the physical world was *the* major bottleneck in this mode of art-making, a bottleneck that Dwan was uniquely positioned to break.

Almost exactly one year to the day later, Dwan purchased a square mile of land near Overton, Nevada (approximately eighty miles northeast of Las Vegas), as a site for Michael Heizer.⁶⁵ On this plot, Heizer produced a number of landscape interventions that were presented, in documentary form, at his first solo show at Dwan: *New York/Nevada*, which opened the gallery’s program in January 1970. However, the centerpiece of the exhibition was the truly gargantuan *Double Negative*, a massive removal and replacement of earth that totaled nearly a quarter of a million tons and stretched to thirty feet deep and ran for over a quarter of a mile. While the encomia were far from universal, reception of the work was often gushing. The *New Yorker*, for example, described Heizer’s work as “unconstrained, timeless, an art for the future to find,” and praiseful comparisons abounded between Heizer’s approach and the ambition of prehistoric monuments such as the Nazca lines or Stonehenge.⁶⁶

63. A close second, John Gibson’s *Ecological Art* (1969), demonstrates the interconnectedness of these ideas, venues, and people. Gibson had been the original director of the Dwan-supported Park Place, and went on to form his own gallery, which addressed many of the same themes and featured many of the artists whose careers Dwan had launched.

64. Meyer, *Los Angeles to New York*, 311.

65. Meyer, *Los Angeles to New York*, 94.

66. Harold Rosenberg, “The Art World: De-Aestheticization,” *New Yorker* (January 24,

It is instructive to compare this monumental undertaking with Heizer's previous *9 Nevada Depressions*. According to Scull, their collaboration began when Heizer simply wrote him an unsolicited letter asking for financial backing. Scull, having grown bored with the gallery-bound world of Pop Art, was intrigued enough to begin bankrolling Heizer. Expecting the total would "run to maybe a thousand bucks or so," Scull was flabbergasted when bills for all sorts of expenses started piling up in his New York office, and he decided to visit Heizer's site. In a subsequent interview, Scull recalled with dismay—tempered by the clear admiration he felt for Heizer—that many of the works had already disappeared without a trace. For Heizer, the *Depressions* had never been envisioned as permanent; though some of them stretched to over 1000 feet long, the trenches were superficial and thus intended to easily slip back into the seemingly featureless landscape from which they had been cut. These works were preserved primarily in a luxurious, leather-bound photo album that Heizer had given to Scull, but even that was evidently too permanent a form for the artist. In an episode eerily redolent of the ritual of Klein's *Zones*, Heizer asked to borrow the album back from Scull, and then promptly destroyed it. Giving the book back to Heizer, Scull claims, "was the biggest mistake I ever made."⁶⁷

Dwan's arrangement with Heizer bears out a completely different set of dynamics. Their undertakings were designed to create transhistorical permanence rather than evanescent ephemerality, and the conditions of their arrangement were thus much more conducive to long-term perdurance. Dwan had purchased the land and financed the creation of *Double Negative*, and under the precedent described above, would be expected to inherit the title if the piece never sold. Tellingly, while many objects were offered at Heizer's solo show, these were all of a documentary variety, such as drawings and photographs. And while Dwan has claimed *Double Negative* "has always been for sale," the work itself was absent from the sales checklist that accompanied the show.⁶⁸ And following an expanded version of the industry norm, Dwan paid Heizer to acquire full ownership of the work itself.⁶⁹ This con-

1970), 293. See also Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 33.

67. Jed Horne, "A New Stonehenge in Nevada," *Quest* 80 (September 1973): 76.

68. Exhibition Archives, Archives of American Art. Dwan, quoted in *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties*, Suzaan Boettger and Franklin D. Murphy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 211, see <https://books.google.com/books?id=sU0IDQAAQBAJ&pg=PA211>

69. Meyer, *Los Angeles to New York*, 312.

DWAN GALLERY 29 W. 57 STREET N.Y.C. 10019 PL 8-4970

PRICE LIST

MICHAEL HEIZER - Jan. 10 - Feb. 5, 1970
"Temporary Exhibit, Jan., New York
Permanent - Nevada"

IN THE FRONT GALLERY

1. 30 ton granite mass, *Photograph*
14½' x 6'
1969
Nevada \$2,500
2. Displaced Mass, *Photograph*
Double Negative Rotary Interior (360°)
From Center Base Of Avalanche Cut (42')
1100' x 42' x 30'
40,000 tons displaced
Virgin River Mesa, Nevada
1969 \$1,800
3. Displaced Mass, *Photograph*
View from north cut looking 600' across
300' depth open canyon space to avalanche
cut and south wall cut.
1100' x 42' x 30'

IN THE CORRIDOR

1. Levitated Mass/Cement block in ground
Etched inked and gummed offset plate
1969 \$500

IN REAR GALLERY

1. Munich Depression Optical Diagrams
Etched inked and gummed offset plate 1969 \$500
2. Sunset - Nevada
Photo transparency on plexiglas
5' x 5' \$2,200

VIRGINIA DWAN'S OFFICE

1. Sunset - Nevada
Photo transparency on plexiglas
7'11" l x 1'11" w \$1,200

SOLD

Price list for Michael Heizer exhibition (1970). (Image courtesy Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.)

stancy of provenance had the effect of helping to guarantee both the physical and institutional survival of Heizer's work. It would not be enough for the holes created by *Double Negative* to continue standing as a site marked apart; Dwan's continued attention would be needed to ensure that the work persisted as a viable, visible object of interest for the institutional actors of the art world: collectors, curators, writers, and other artists.

A similar set of conditions underpinned the creation of the most famous Earthwork of all, Robert Smithson's iconic *Spiral Jetty* (1970). Working with Dwan as well as Ace Gallery—an ascendant Los Angeles gallery run out of the Westwood space vacated by Dwan—Smithson arranged a lease for himself on ten acres of land in Great Salt Lake, Utah. With Dwan providing \$9,000 of construction financing and Smithson attracting a group of studio assistants that included the young Castelli sculptor Richard Serra, the artist set about finding a local contractor. After several rebuffed the strange artistic character from the East Coast, a local builder named Bob Phillips took up the call. Despite Phillips's puzzlement over Smithson's strange vocabulary and eschewing what he described as “contracting rules with engineers and surveying and all that kind of stuff,” the two became successful collaborators. Phillips recalled that he somehow acceded to Smithson's authority over the site, recalling that “when we got out there, he just took over. . . . He just had the eye for it. I assume it was the artist in him.” Smithson's and Phillips's crew endeavored for well over a week to build (and rebuild) 7,000 tons of black basalt rocks and earth into a 1,500-foot mineral spiral on a dry.⁷⁰ And like Heizer's previous show, what came back east to the gallery was only visual evidence. Instead of the usual sample containers, Smithson showed a thirty-six minute essayistic film, cobbled together, in his words, out of “disconnections, a bramble . . . ingredients trapped in a succession of frames, a stream of viscosities both still and moving.”⁷¹ For Smithson, the filmic documentation had become a kind of nonsite of its own, taking on the mineral properties of the site itself but dislocating them into a different kind of temporal and spatial vacuum.

70. Virginia Dwan Gallery Archives, Smithsonian American Art Museum (Robert Smithson: Great Salt Lake, Utah, 1970 Exhibition File). See also Steve Griffin, “Bob Phillips, Contractor on Spiral Jetty, Dies at 75,” *Salt Lake Tribune* (April 18, 2016).

71. Robert Smithson, “The Spiral Jetty,” *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Nancy Holt (New York: New York University Press), 110.

ENDOWING PERPETUITY

The last of the iconic trio of Earthworks, Walter De Maria's *Lightning Field* would be produced under drastically different circumstances. Though the original 1974 version was dedicated to Dwan, by the time of its creation, her gallery had already been shuttered for two years. According to De Maria, the burn rate had been visibly unsustainable. As he recalled, Dwan had permitted her artists to "run up 20, 30 thousand dollars' worth of debts," a situation that had led to "bloodthirsty fights" between them.⁷² The final straw was one soaked with irony, with Dwan receiving notice from the IRS that expenditures to finance works she could not sell would no longer count as tax-deductible losses.⁷³ Financial distress, emotional exhaustion, and the diminishing returns of a brick-and-mortar gallery put the writing on the wall, and the Dwan Gallery ceased operations in late 1971. Even in the wake of the closure, and Smithson's tragic death in an airplane crash shortly thereafter, Dwan remained committed to advocating for the artists whom she had supported through the gallery. In 1972, she provided early financing for Michael Heizer's *City*, the construction of which continues to the present day. She also supported the construction of Charles Ross's *Star Axis*, another as-yet-uncompleted edifice begun in 1976, as well as the *Dwan Light Sanctuary*, completed in 1996, which showcased Ross's crystalline work.⁷⁴

But it is the story of De Maria's *Lightning Field* that best demonstrates how Dwan's continued efforts, in the twilight years of her gallery, helped to ensure the long-term survival of the kind of work that her program did so much to foster. The genesis of the piece reveals in microcosm the complex-

72. Paul Cummings, "Oral History Interview with Walter De Maria" (1972), Archives of American Art, at <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-walter-de-maria-12362> (accessed 2/26/18).

73. Dwan alludes to this changed situation in an interview with *New York Times* columnist Michael Kimmelman: "Unfortunately, the I.R.S. doesn't let you lose money endlessly. They can start considering the business a hobby." See Kimmelman, "The Forgotten Godmother of Dia's Artists," *New York Times* (May 11, 2003). Most easily accessible through *Times* online archive. The revision of Dwan's tax situation was probably tied up in a tightening of applicable law; in 1969, Congress passed Section 183, which aimed to limit the deductions of business losses by reclassifying some such ventures with structural losses as hobbies. The hobby restrictions antedates the law itself, but its passage speaks to an ethos of heightened regulatory enforcement. For more see Thomas A. Condon, "Section 183: Work Horse or Hobby Loss," *Catholic University Law Review* 20, no. 4 (Summer 1971): 716–35.

74. Notably, Dwan seems not to have supported the work of Nancy Holt, who became the most prominent female Land artist in the wake of Smithson's death.

ity of ownership and preservation that earth-scaped projects introduce into the work of art. Tracing back to De Maria's only solo show with Dwan, the Kunstmuseum Basel had expressed interest in buying *Bed of Spikes* (1968). De Maria begged Dwan for an unusual arrangement: he would sell the work directly to the museum (disintermediating the gallery), and then use the proceeds to construct a land work he would give back to Dwan. The museum, for its part, nearly cancelled the sale. The board balked at the acquisition of the challenging, physically dangerous object, but Kunstmuseum director Franz Meyer, believing in the strength of De Maria's practice, purchased the work privately.⁷⁵ With sale proceeds in hand, De Maria set out to produce *Lightning Field* near Meteor Crater, AZ, on land owned by prominent Dwan (and Castelli) collectors Burton and Emily Tremaine. The Tremaines, however, never quite came around to the work. They were offered the piece for sale, which they declined, and De Maria refused to permit the long-term persistence of a work without ownership or title to the land. The piece was pulled down, and ownership of the materials, thirty-five twenty-foot poles, reverted to Dwan.⁷⁶

She would come to donate them to the new Dia Foundation, the chartering of which clearly demonstrated how her vision of idea-based art was beginning to spread institutional roots. Launched almost synchronously with De Maria's first *Lightning Field*—to which it would commission the now-iconic followup version in 1977—the Dia Foundation was designed, as its original mission statement espoused, to support artistic projects “which cannot be easily produced, financed or owned by individual collectors because of their cost and magnitude.”⁷⁷ Dia's emergence can be traced to a confluence of factors, one of which was the boomerang return of the European interest in American art so perspicaciously seeded by Castelli. As he was building American interest through his network of collectors and museums, Castelli was also assiduously cultivating the patronage of European mega-collectors such as the German chocolate magnate Peter Ludwig, who went on to become one of the world's most prolific collectors of Pop Art. After his death in 1966, rival collector Karl Stroehrer sensed an opportunity

75. Jonathan Kandell, “The Secret of Swiss Museums,” *Art & Antiques* (August 2017), <http://www.artandantiquesmag.com/2017/08/switzerland-museums/> (accessed 09/29/2020).

76. Lauren O'Neill-Butler, “Virginia Dwan, as Told to Lauren O'Neill-Butler,” *Artforum* (February 2011), <https://www.artforum.com/interviews/virginia-dwan-on-her-life-and-work-45250> (accessed 2/27/18).

77. Bob Colacello, “Remains of the Dia,” *Vanity Fair* (April 2008), <https://www.vanityfair.com/magazine/1996/09/colacello199609> (accessed 2/27/18).

and he began acquiring work with new energy—patronizing the internationalist Castelli as well as an ascendant local talent, the Munich-based gallerist Heiner Friedrich.⁷⁸

Following the paradigm laid out by Castelli himself, Friedrich endeavored to establish the reputation of his gallery's program through a carefully constructed program that mixed cutting-edge German and American contemporary art, most of which drew out a kind of aesthetic mysticism latent within the work of certain Conceptual and environmental artists. It was Friedrich's gallery that had exhibited De Maria's provocative *Earth Room* (1968), a show followed by a series of commissions Friedrich gave to Michael Heizer. These included projects out in the deserts of the West (*Triple Landscape* and *Five Conic Displacements*) as well as a work in Germany (*Munich Depression*, 1969). According to a contemporary account published in the *New Yorker*, Friedrich entered negotiations with Dwan to buy *Double Negative* on behalf of an unnamed German collector—quite possibly Stroehrer—but the market attention made Heizer nervous and he subsequently asked Dwan to cancel the sale.⁷⁹ Heizer's respected wish to scotch this transaction, even while Dwan was financing the creation of its sequel, demonstrates the singularity of the conditions in which these works were able to unfold.

But Friedrich was undeterred. In 1972, he made his first pilgrimage to Houston to cultivate a relationship with John and Dominique de Menil, two powerful American patrons whose spiritually inflected collecting philosophy aligned with his vision. Their attraction to this philosophy was on bold display in the Rothko Chapel—a contemporary museum *cum* non-denominational worship space commissioned by the de Menils in the early 1970s—and Friedrich managed to gain access to spend the night in the Chapel shortly after it opened.⁸⁰ A followup trip to Houston would see Friedrich leading a pilgrimage out to Heizer's *Double Negative*, taking along the de Menils as well as Houston-based art historian Helen Winkler. Winkler was transformed by the experience, and when Friedrich set up a small gallery in lower Manhattan, she came to New York to join him. Winkler soon

78. Cohen-Solal, *Leo and His Circle*, 379.

79. Calvin Tomkins, "Maybe a Quantum Leap," *New Yorker* (February 5, 1972), 42.

80. Though records for the original sale do not survive in gallery files, an insurance appraisal given to Dominique de Menil by Castelli demonstrates their financial interconnection. In April 1976, Castelli appraised Johns's *Grey Alphabet* (1956), a major early-career canvas, at \$450,000, nearly double the record-setting mark of \$240,000—the highest price ever paid for the work of a living American artist—achieved by Johns in the Scull auction only two years prior. See Leo Castelli Gallery Files, Archives of American Art.

recruited her close friend Philippa de Menil (daughter of John and Dominique) to join them as a financial sponsor for a new kind of organization dedicated to supporting work like *Double Negative*. Shortly thereafter, Friedrich became the founding director of Dia, and then married the financial backer of his new curatorial venture.

Although many have wondered about an internal relationship between Dwan and Dia in the latter's early days, Dwan has been at pains to deny her involvement. While she was familiar with Friedrich from his prior exhibition of Heizer and De Maria—which Dwan characterized as “borrowing” work from her gallery—she described a period of “hiding out” after the closure of her gallery to squelch rumors that she sought to continue her work by exerting control over other institutions.⁸¹ More than her influence over Friedrich, what is most instructive is the contrast between their approaches. Although Dwan is sometimes compared to a Medici as a patron for monumental work, the comparison fits badly on a number of levels: her reticence to seek the spotlight or impose her own editorial vision, as well as her earnest (if largely unsuccessful) attempts to sell the work she commissioned. Rather, it was Friedrich who actively constructed Medici patronage as a precedent for his activities—orchestrating an origin story for Dia in a Renaissance church and endowing the foundation with an aptly classicizing moniker to support this precedent.⁸²

In its early days, Dia embarked on a spree of commissions virtually without compare. Officially launched in 1974, the Foundation announced itself to the world with the support of an indoor/outdoor installation by Castelli artist Dan Flavin, mounted at the same Kunstmuseum Basel with which Dwan had been working. Within three years, a string of major De Maria projects was underway: an installation at the German art festival Documenta that involved completely burying a kilometer-long brass rod vertically into the earth; the second, 400-pole *Lightning Field* on land purchased in New Mexico; and *New York Earth Room*, a sequel to the *Munich Earth Room* Friedrich previously commissioned. The New York iteration was turned into a permanent fixture in Dia's headquarters, and the Foundation simply bought another office for itself. But the largesse did not stop with De Maria.

81. Charles Stuckey, “Oral History Interview with Virginia Dwan, 2011,” Archives of American Art.

82. For Dwan, see Blake Gopnik, “Virginia Dwan, A Jet Age Medici, Gets Her Due,” *New York Times* (September 16, 2016). For Friedrich, see Alexander Keefe, “Whirling in the West: On DIA and/as Spiritual Conspiracy,” *Bidoun* 23, at <https://www.bidoun.org/articles/whirling-in-the-west> (accessed 10/2/2020).

In this same period, the Foundation commissioned another massive Flavin project (for Grand Central Terminal), acquired and funded a permanent site for the Young/Zazeela *Dream House*, and purchased a volcanic crater for artist James Turrell.⁸³

Over its tumultuous first decade, Dia was laying out up to \$5,000,000 per year with negligible income, and an internequine fight over artistic control and family fortune spilled out into public view. In 1985, the New York State attorney general launched an investigation, which spurred Philippa's mother Dominique to seize control. Young and Zazeela were evicted from their live-in installation, property was sold off, and Friedrich was replaced by former Metropolitan Museum executive Ashton Hawkins as head of the board. While wrestling over the organization's mission continued, the new leadership brought stability. Assets were sold, the endowment was stabilized, and, in the middle 1990s, the deputy director of the Guggenheim was hired as the director of the renamed Dia Center for the Arts. Govan was an apt choice; he had been closely involved with the Guggenheim's acquisition of the collection of Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, a major patron of Castelli's circle in Italy and benefactor to Dia's 1977 *Lightning Field*.⁸⁴ Under Govan, Dia accepted the donation of Smithsonian's *Spiral Jetty* from the artist's estate and Holt. And notwithstanding a bureaucratic snafu over the government land lease, Dia's stewardship has seen the work grow into one of the most recognized works of the 20th century.⁸⁵

The precedent for this donation was again set by Dwan, who in 1980

83. Colacello, "Remains of the Dia."

84. Anna C. Chave, "Revaluing Minimalism: Patronage, Aura, and Place," *Art Bulletin* 90, no. 3 (September 2008): 471.

85. The director of the Holt/Smithson Foundation explained that Dia was known for its ongoing commitment to stewardship of challenging works, for example Walter De Maria's *Earth Room* (1977). The exponential increase in travel to *Spiral Jetty* required close collaboration between the estate, Dia, and the state government over seemingly mundane issues such as road signage and public bathrooms. Author interview with Lisa Le Feuvre, director of the Holt/Smithson Foundation, October 19, 2020. For issues regarding the *Spiral Jetty* lease—evidently caused by the death of Dia's point of contact with the Utah Department of Natural Resource—see Greg Allen, "Site Specifics: Why I'm Bidding on the Lease for the Spiral Jetty Site," *greg.org* (July 7, 2011), at <https://greg.org/archive/2011/07/07/site-specifics-why-im-bidding-on-the-lease-for-the-spiral-jetty-site.html> (accessed 10/3/2020). Also notable, Govan, who has since gone on to the directorship of the LA County Museum of Art, has continued to be an important institutional advocate for Michael Heizer's work. Dana Goodyear, "A Monument to Outlast Humanity," *New Yorker* (August 2016), <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/08/29/michael-heizers-city> (accessed 10/3/2020).

chose MOCA–Los Angeles as the institutional home for *Double Negative*.⁸⁶ The acquisition, even as donation, occasioned substantial pushback from the board, but the resistance was overcome by director Richard Koshalek, whose vision for the new institution was predicated on flexibility in both physical footprint and conceptual inclusion.⁸⁷ But as the *Los Angeles Times* noted, the notion of institutional homes for stridently anti-institutional art raised a number of difficulties. The most obvious problem—that of bringing an isolated, immobile canyon in Nevada “into” the collection—could be solved on the level of rhetoric. Koshalek argued to the *Times* that the Heizer situation was not so different than a museum being charged with the stewardship of a period house removed from its main campus.⁸⁸ But, as the paper observed, artists such as Heizer had moved into the land so as to create art that “unsalable and uncollectable.” The bringing of *Double Negative* into a museum—a public collection, but a collection all the same—seemed to bring with it the market baggage that the piece had ostensibly left behind. The donation, even as uncommercially motivated as it appeared to be, would involve an appraisal for tax purposes, which “might have practical ramifications on the art market testing whether works like ‘Double Negative’ remain essentially worthless or priceless or if they will become specifically quantified.”⁸⁹ With rhetoric equating sale, exchangeability, and value swirling, the economic and

86. Dwan has since donated works to MoMA, the Walker Museum (MN), and the Norton Simon Museum, and recently made a major gift of more than 250 objects to the National Gallery of Art in connection with a major retrospective of her gallery presented in 2017. See Carol Vogel, “Virginia Dwan’s Big Gift to the National Gallery,” *New York Times* (September 26, 2013), <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/27/arts/design/virginia-dwans-big-gift-to-the-national-gallery.html> (accessed 10/3/2020).

87. See also Koshalek’s work at the Walker and the pre-existence of the “Guerrilla Museum” as morphed into the “Temporary Contemporary.” Author interview with Richard Koshalek.

88. Notably, because of his involvement with the museification of *Double Negative*, Koshalek was in fact the Dia board’s first choice for the director role subsequently given to Govan. See Colacello, “Remains of the Dia.”

89. William Wilson, “New MOCA Acquisition Is a Hole in the Ground,” *Los Angeles Times* (December 10, 1985), http://articles.latimes.com/1985-12-10/entertainment/ca-15620_1_land-art (accessed 2/27/18). Notably, this appraisal, if it took place, was not disclosed publicly. It is also important to note that this acquisition has raised thorny issues concerning preservation and the potentially mutable wishes of artists. While Heizer initially intended to allow the work to decay naturally, he has come to regard preservation in pristine status as important. Govan has suggested that this change of heart stems in part from ongoing bitterness over his rivalry with Smithson, who Heizer believes “stole” the idea of making art in the Western deserts. In a recent interview, Heizer referred to Smithson as “a manipulating, devious tinhorn . . . a complete phony.” See Goodyear, “Monument to Outlast Humanity.”

institutional mechanisms of the art world were again construed as inimical to the outsider promise of Land Art.

But this notion of operating outside such a system had, even for the makers of Earthworks, always been a chimera. In a recent lecture, Dwan summarized her thoughts about the interrelationships between art-making and the art market. While emphasizing that she had little patience for the facile commodification of aesthetic experience, she maintained that

The business of art is valid and essential. People appreciate what they pay for. Contrary to rumor, I can't recall a single work shown at the Dwan Gallery that was not for sale. I believe in selling. Art given does not seem to elicit the same attention and consideration as that which is bought.⁹⁰

This position, of engagement rather than retreat, characterized the view of Dwan's artists as well. As Smithson noted in an interview conducted shortly before his death, "dealers and museums are essentially intertwined, related, so I don't really see that as a big problem. . . . I mean there's value making, there always been that connection."⁹¹ Indeed, Smithson held that the primary problem lay in the fantasy of disconnection itself. The ideology of creative purity fostered a naïve isolation that prevented artists from engaging with the often bare-knuckles institutional negotiations through which any contemporary work comes to acquire lasting intellectual or market value.

Indeed, in the same interview Smithson astutely observed that this value was the product not only of individual actors, but of a network conditioned by broad-based social and political institutions. "Like it or not," Smithson explained, "the art world is not a separate world . . . there are many golden threads." Between them, Dwan and her circle of artists helped to spin a web of such threads, a nascent marketplace of ideas in which collectors, foundations, and museums would steward unmovable monuments into an unknowable future. Koshalek's analogy with a museum's supervision of a period building develops the rationale further, where the museum not only fills the role of owner but provides conservation, promotes public interest, organizes legal action, and fosters art-historical knowledge-building around its "object."

90. Quoted in Meyer, *Los Angeles to New York*, 253.

91. Edward Kurtz, "Interview with Robert Smithson," in Flam (ed.), *Robert Smithson*, 262.

But for Smithson, these “golden threads” encompassed a whole set of possibilities beyond private patronage—including, as he put it, “federal or state grants, and . . . bureaucracies that channel the funds.” Smithson came to appreciate the power of direct government support for the arts from his brief experiences working in Europe; at the moment he made this observation, government funding was rarely considered a source of support in the New York-based art world. However, the next chapter explores the story of the gallerist who turned to these possibilities in earnest, creating through them a network of support for a nascent mode of electronically focused art-making that—because of its technologically esoteric format and often radically disruptive, abrasive aesthetic—would make a canyon in the Nevada wilderness seem like an easy thing to sell.

3 ♦ Circuits of Exchange

Howard Wise and Distributing Media

A total media link on a digital base erases the notion of medium itself . . . absolute knowledge will run on an endless loop.

—FRIEDRICH A. KITTLER (1997, 32)

In 1957, ten months after Castelli hosted his first exhibition outside of his townhouse, another gallery venture based around similar premises opened its doors in Cleveland, Ohio. Like Castelli and his space, Howard Wise launched his venue and second career with family resources secured from a first career. Wise had spent his entire professional life in the Arco Company—an industrial paint and varnish manufacturer founded by his father—which he joined upon returning to Cleveland after completing undergraduate studies at Cambridge University. He rose through the managerial ranks and ascended to the company presidency in the early 1930s. He guided Arco through the Depression and the postwar boom, and then, after twenty-five years at the helm, abruptly sold the family company to fully attend to his lifelong passion for art.¹ Like the Dwan and Castelli Galleries, the Howard Wise Gallery of Present Day Painting and Sculpture began with a focus on abstract painting. But Wise almost immediately staked out

1. Marita Sturken, "TV as a Creative Medium: Howard Wise and Video Art," *Afterimage* 11, no. 10 (May 1984): 5. Case Western Reserve University, "Samuel Wise," *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, at <http://case.edu/ech/articles/w/wise-samuel-d/> (accessed 3/26/18).



Howard Wise with Len Lye sculptures, c. 1970. (Image courtesy *Electronic Arts Intermix.*)

a more boldly international repertoire, with shows of artists drawn not only from New York and Paris but also the UK, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Japan, and Brazil. This comparatively broad exhibition program positioned Wise within a more diverse set of artistic crosscurrents and—in combination with his industrial background—enabled the gallery to engage with ideas that had otherwise fallen by the artistic wayside.

The point here is worth emphasizing. While Castelli, Dwan, and Wise all attempted to move their gallery's vision beyond the narrow strictures of high modern abstract painting, Dwan and especially Castelli framed their programming as an explicit rebuttal to this reigning orthodoxy. Such positioning was especially critical for Castelli, who made novel use of academicians to connect the work of his stable back to the esteemed canon of Old Masters. Wise also showed many of the artists then understood to be the leading edge of that tradition, exhibiting for example the same circle of French and Italian avant-gardists making their presence felt at the Dwan and Castelli Galleries. But by contrast with these other dealers, Wise was comparatively catholic in the way he constructed an intellectual pedigree for these investigations. Rather than limiting itself to the confines and traditions of painting, the Wise Gallery foregrounded issues of optics, electricity, perceptual physiology, and other concerns far beyond the historically bounded genre form of "art." Wise's background as a chemical manufacturer probably informed this expansively scientific approach, but the germ of his interest matters less than its implications: as the nature of Wise's ideas overspilled the confines of the art world, the solutions to marshaling stakeholder support behind them would by necessity transcend the parameters of a traditional gallery and collecting base.

Though short-lived in both its Cleveland and New York venues, Howard Wise Gallery did achieve notable success, exhibiting international luminaries and garnering significant critical attention for the aesthetic applications of technology. Wise's *TV as a Creative Medium* (1969)—an ambitious, dozen-artist survey explored in greater depth below—is widely considered a watershed event in the history of so-called "new media art." But just over a year after that banner exhibition, Wise decided to shutter the gallery to launch Electronic Arts Intermix, a new kind of initiative dedicated to promoting and distributing, rather than buying and selling, works by technology-minded artists.² As EAI grew, it sought to create, almost out of the whole

2. The primary source of information on Wise's activities from the Gallery through EAI can be found in "A Kinetic History," available on the EAI website: <https://www.eai.org/webpages/21>

cloth, an entire supporting infrastructure. To make work that truly took up the challenge of television as a mass medium with avant-garde potential, artists needed access to (and training on) specialized, expensive equipment. They also needed the means to broadcast their work to the public and to share stable versions with writers, fellow artists, and the occasional collector interested in this emerging territory. And eventually, artists would need the means to preserve for posterity work that was continually threatened by material instability and technological obsolescence. Wise's efforts met with remarkably durable success, as EAI matured over several decades into the single most important vector through which time-based and electronic artworks have come to historical and curatorial attention. Indeed, the story of institutional acceptance for video and media art is largely inseparable from the history of EAI.

In the context of this volume, this achievement furnishes several important examples of the ways in which supporting institutions both shape and are shaped by the work mounted under their banners. On this point, it is illustrative to compare Wise with Dwan. Both began their ventures with backing from family fortunes, and both set out to run what were ostensibly commercial galleries. Both pivoted away from the expected course of business, dedicating their venues to work that, because of its esoteric, ephemeral, or obdurate nature, resisted the straightforward sales of *objets d'art*. Indeed, it is because of this parallelism that these two figures occupy proximal positions as case studies in this book, evincing the ways in which financial structures outside of profit motives nevertheless leave their mark by opening up new avenues for the fabrication, dissemination, and preservation of art.

However, the juxtaposition between Dwan and Wise is also intended to illuminate contrast. As examples of worlds operating outside of or beyond profit, the ecosystems nurtured by these two figures form neat obverses of one another. The Earthworks that Dwan supported were privileged, singular achievements and massive material undertakings addressed to the deep time of civilizational achievement. Her program fostered something like an elite marketplace of ideas, in which the concept of (or deed to) a *Double Negative* could be possessed, even if the object could never be moved. But where Dwan's program drilled into site-specific singularity and timeless history, the work supported by Wise's EAI was predicated on opposing principles:

(accessed 10/30/2020). The Howard Wise Papers at the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, also provide important information on Wise's activities as a dealer before the founding of EAI.

technological collaboration and co-creation, broad electronic dissemination, and urgent cultural interventions in service of the immediate future. Breathing life into an interdependent ecosystem standing behind such work would require a different solution than Dwan's coterie of high-net-worth patrons.

As such, Wise made pioneering use of both government and private-foundation sources of grant funding, the radical nature of which has been obfuscated by the contemporary ubiquity of artist's awards, fellowships, and residencies. But while public support for the arts had a deeper historical standing in Europe, the American art world of the 1970s had not yet begun to consider grant funding as a means to support serious artistic investigations.³ Crossing the credibility gap on both sides—shepherding countercultural creators through bureaucratic application processes, while simultaneously convincing institutional gatekeepers of the importance of avant-garde experimentation—required a painstaking retail politics that is explored in greater depth below. But here at the outset, it is important to note how the heretofore overlooked possibilities of grant monies opened up new creative horizons, in part because turning to this means of support would entail reimagining the preconditions of artistic success. To state it most succinctly, as Castelli's system required a series of sales at rising prices, and Dwan's artists needed to execute progressively more ambitious commissions, Wise's program would depend on successful and repeating applications to external grant funders.

The implications are subtle but foundationally important. Commercially minded, or privately commissioned, art demands to be positioned as something to be loved (or as the next chapter reveals, speculated on) by a small group of actors. By contrast, projects supported by grants typically need to be approved by a broad, multitiered committee. The difference is between a few saying yes and many not saying no. But once past the many potential points of rejection, successful grant applications can often tap into a ready mechanism to renew funding. As such, grants from government initiatives or private foundations are uniquely suited to address the recurring expenses

3. This eschewing of public grants was neither complete nor universal; Jackson Pollock famously applied for a Guggenheim Fellowship to extend the work he had undertaken in Peggy Guggenheim's mural, and Robert Rauschenberg's Dante drawings, discussed at length in chapter 1 of the present volume, were also the subject of a Guggenheim application. However, as analyzed at length by art historian Howard Singerman, the present idiom of grant and residency support coalesced as part of the transformation of art education in line with the model of grant-funded academic research in the sciences. See chapter 4 of *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

inherent in building and maintaining the capabilities—such as production equipment and operating expertise—without which ambitious electronic art could never have been produced. Grant measures such as “impact” were also conducive to Wise’s embrace of channels, such as public broadcasting and popular music festivals, that appear counterintuitive for the dissemination of avant-garde experimentation. Moreover, the civic-minded orientation of grant funders seems to have rewarded certain early directions in the field while frustrating others; for example there was a drift away from computational graphics research and toward a progressive politics of representation and inclusion. And finally, it was the matrix of grant funding that created a backstop for EAI to radically reconsider what could constitute the institutionalization of art produced under its auspices. EAI broke genuinely unprecedented ground by offering artworks to museums and collectors through licenses—distributing low-cost exhibition copies of videotape-bound works, the tapes themselves not being deemed to constitute precious, preservable objects. At the time, there was almost no precedent for placing in museums works produced in an unlimited number of technologically identical, “disposable” copies.

Wise’s EAI was both timely and prescient. Its form as an ecosystem-network resonated and intersected with the circuits that were then growing to disseminate both avant-garde film and independent music. And notably, EAI provides an edge case example of the many contemporaneous infrastructures rising to support the distribution of film, video, and slide-projector media for needs ranging from workforce training and youth education to product marketing and mass entertainment. The same fundamental technologies and unit economics that underpinned the success of EAI’s leasing service for high-concept videotapes led, over the next decade, to the rise of a global market for at-home movie rental. Moreover, the multistakeholder model of maker-consumers creating and sharing work through equipment and channels all owned or controlled by different entities anticipates the extremely contemporary rise of venture-backed platform capitalism. As historian Thomas Crow has famously observed, “the avant-garde serves as a kind of research and development arm of the culture industry.”⁴ But while Crow was primarily pointing to the colonization of content, for example the adaptation of Dada and punk vocabularies to market sneakers and energy

4. Thomas Crow, *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 35.

drinks, Wise's EAI demonstrates how this observation rings true at the level of finance and supply chain.

However, these world-historical parallels and anticipations would have been off on the edges of visibility at the moment of EAI's inception. Back in 1971, Wise would probably have been much more conscious of stepping into a space both too empty and too full. While a collector base simply did not exist for media-based practices, a number of entrenched financial players had been entering the media art terrain—from Castelli-Sonnabend Tapes and Films to artist-in-residence programs at IBM and Bell Labs.⁵ None of these ventures, however, created anywhere near the lasting impact of EAI. It speaks volumes that the historically significant works of technology-forward art produced through these other venues are now most easily accessible to museums and historians through the EAI catalog.

While counterfactuals are typically off limits to the historian, I would argue that part of the explanation for the comparative failure of these other initiatives must lie in the misfit between their received organizational processes and the fundamentally new kind of art they strove to foster. For Castelli, providing a Portapak videorecorder for the use of his artists was not fundamentally different than his facilitation of access to bronze casting. And while technology corporations often spent lavishly on one-off events, projects, or collaborations, the generous support of single ambitious works is likely to achieve a much better effect if the medium is earth and stone rather than advanced, and therefore typically unstable, technology. Wise, by contrast, discovered and created a means to provide ongoing support—including but not limited to the monetary kind—to what grew over decades into a self-attracting community of practice. Indeed, the ways in which Wise cultivated new funds, new channels, and new audiences were expressively entangled with, as well as vitally important to, the ongoing florescence of media-based art.

BRICK AND MORTAR, CLEVELAND TO NEW YORK

But to properly attend to the story of Electronic Arts Intermix, it is necessary to consider how the shape and mission of that organization sprang from Wise's experience showcasing technology-forward art within a more

5. For more see Charlie Gere, *Digital Culture* (New York: Reaktion Books, 2009), 105.

traditionally configured gallery. Indeed, this idiom first emerged out of the uncommonly internationalist program of the Howard Wise Gallery of Present Day Painting and Sculpture. While Wise foregrounded painted abstraction—as did nearly every other forward-looking venue in the late 1950s—his exhibitions juxtaposed semilocal artists (often drawn from prestigious institutions such as the Carnegie in Pittsburgh or the Cranbrook Institute in Michigan) with figures from the global avant-garde. In the first year of the gallery alone, Wise showcased abstract painters hailing from France, Italy, Germany, Japan, and Romania in a wide variety of exhibition formats.⁶ It was within this context that he showed the work of György Kepes, a Hungarian-born designer-theorist and protégé of first-generation Bauhaus leader Lazlo Maholy-Nagy. At the time of his exhibition with Wise, Kepes was a faculty member at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a leading global thinker working to hybridize the aesthetic and scientific exploration of visual perception.⁷

Though he exhibited stationary paintings at Wise, Kepes, through his connection to Maholy-Nagy, was deeply tied into a European tradition in which contemporary technologies such as electric lights and motors were used to inject a forward-looking dynamism into the static traditions of painting and sculpture. This ferment soon found footing at Wise's 1961 *Movement in Art*, an exhibition that featured Jean Tinguely, whose self-destructing machines had recently been included in Dwan's LA program, as well as the pioneering sculptor and experimental filmmaker Len Lye, who would go on to become perhaps the most internationally prominent mainstay in Wise's program.⁸ The shape of this program, however, took an important turn in the wake of *Movement*. The following year, Wise closed his Cleveland space and decamped for New York, opening the more succinctly named Howard Wise Gallery on the same block of 57th street that Virginia Dwan would relocate to.⁹ In New York, he soon picked up the thread from Cleveland.

6. See Exhibition Files, Howard Wise Gallery, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

7. For more on Kepes, see Melissa S. Ragain, "From Organization to Network: MIT's Center for Advanced Visual Studies," *X-Tra* 14, no. 3 (Spring 2012), <http://x-traonline.org/article/from-organization-tonetwork-mits-center-for-advanced-visual-studies/> (accessed 3/26/18). Also see Otto Piene, "In Memoriam Gyorgy Kepes, 1906–2002," *Leonardo* 36, no. 1 (February 2003): 3–4.

8. Roger Horrocks, *Len Lye: A Biography* (Auckland, NZ: Auckland University Press, 2001), 288.

9. While EAI cites 1960 as the opening of the Howard Wise Gallery in New York (a date repeated in much of the historical literature), Wise's papers at the Smithsonian indicate ongoing activity in Cleveland through 1961, with *On the Move* as the first exhibition opening in New York in 1964.

On The Move, which Wise characterized as “the first U.S. survey exhibition of contemporary kinetic art,” was an ambitious undertaking, with precariously configured constructions from artists ranging from Alexander Calder, by far the best-known living American sculptor, to the rising international star Julio Le Parc, who would go on to succeed Rauschenberg as winner of the Golden Lion for Painting at the 1966 Venice Biennale.¹⁰ *On the Move* was quickly followed by more movement: a feature presentation of several massive kinetic Len Lye sculptures and the first US solo show for German artist Otto Piene.

Piene’s debut merits a moment of pause. A member of Group Zero, a Berlin-based performance and light-based collective that overlapped with the Parisian New Realists, Piene and the Zeros were also interested in materialist literalism as the grounds for a new beginning for art. But different than the French cohort, Zero artists were more directly attuned to questions of both technology and politics. These threads come together with striking clarity in Piene’s *Light Ballet*, which was given its American premiere in Wise’s gallery in 1967. As a teenager, Piene had served in the German army as an anti-aircraft gunner, bearing the fearsome responsibility of finding and destroying Allied bomber planes flying under the cover of darkness. After the war, he would return again and again to the visual field of the black sky punctuated by blazes of artificial light, seeking to repurpose the vision of technological warfare into a posttraumatic *tabula rasa*.¹¹ The *Light Ballet*, a kinetic, environmental installation of lights, mirrors, and tracery stencils, was to comprise, in his words, “a zone of silence and of pure possibilities for a new beginning . . . the incommensurable zone in which the old state turns into the new.”¹² The language here explicitly alludes to Piene’s frequent collaborator Yves Klein, but turns the Kleinian terminology toward a haunting poetry of technological swords beaten into quiet plowshares. The repurposing of instrumental technology for culturally and aesthetically ameliorative ends would come to form the central leitmotif of the work Wise supported.

10. Exhibition Files, Howard Wise Gallery, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. For more on Le Parc’s role in the origins of media art, see Armin Medosch, *New Tendencies: Art at the Threshold of the Information Revolution (1961–1978)* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 50–51.

11. Otto Piene Bio at Städel Museum-Frankfurt: <https://sammlung.staedelmuseum.de/en/person/piene-otto> (accessed 10/30/2020). See also Melissa S. Ragain, *Domesticating the Invisible: Form and Environmental Anxiety in Postwar America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021), 119.

12. Otto Piene, “The Development of the Group ‘Zero.’” Originally published in the *Times Literary Supplement* (London) (September 3, 1964), available at <https://www.0-archive.info/otto-piene1.html> (accessed 10/30/2020).

But technology would continue to be important for its own sake. Sandwiched between the Lye and Piene exhibitions of 1965, the Wise gallery precipitated a remarkable feat: the first gallery-based exhibition—and by extension, the first treatment as art—of work created with a computer.¹³ Wise's *Computer-Generated Pictures* came together extraordinarily quickly. Impressed by research on the perception of interference patterns he saw published in the February 1965 issue of *Scientific American*, Wise reached out to the primary investigator, neuroscientist Bela Julesz, about a potential show. Julesz invited his collaborator, Bell Labs engineer A. Michael Noll, to participate in a joint exhibition. Within a few short weeks, the three figures had mounted a one-of-a-kind show—enlargements of digitally generated optical patterns, including stereoscopic configurations complete with the requisite 3D glasses. While the *New York Times* raved about the exhibition—claiming that “the wave of the future crashes significantly at the Howard Wise Gallery”—the show was otherwise largely a flop.¹⁴ No works were sold and, with one exception discussed in greater detail below, Wise would largely steer clear of computer-based work for the next several decades.

But the tireless advocacy for technology-forward art continued unabated. In 1967 Wise curated *Lights in Orbit*, a monumental undertaking with three dozen artists hailing from eleven different countries. The technological ambition of the work on display was striking. As Wise noted in the show's press release, the exhibition featured media including “high intensity quartz-iodide lights; electronic circuitry; laser beams; magnetic distortion of electron beams; polarized light; plastics irradiated by gamma rays; polyester films coated with a monomolecular layer of aluminum; new phosphors having varying controlled rates of decay.”¹⁵ By contrast with the heavily technological *Computer-Generated Pictures*, *Lights in Orbit* was a commercial

13. One could make a case for the slightly earlier exhibition, Generative Computergrafik, at the Technische Hochschule in Stuttgart in February 1965, but this earlier exhibit was self-conceived as a presentation of visualizations rather than works of art.

14. A. Michael Noll, “The Howard Wise Gallery Show of Computer-Generated Pictures (1965): A 50th-Anniversary Memoir,” *Leonardo* 49, no. 3 (2016): 232–39. Regarding the first claim of the show as the first computer-generated-art exhibition, two caveats should be noted. First, one could make the case for a slightly earlier showcase organized by Noll at Technische Hochschule in Stuttgart, but this project was much more like a technical demonstration in a university setting than a presentation in a venue that constructed itself as an art venue. Second, historian Tina Rivers Ryan has claimed that Wise avoided the label of “art” for Noll and Julesz's work. See Tina Rivers Ryan, “Wise Lights,” *Art in America* (October 2014): 148–55.

15. Howard Wise Gallery, “Lights in Orbit” pamphlet, available at <https://www.eai.org/supporting-documents/170/w.1007.0> (accessed 10/30/2020).

and critical success. The exhibition made national news, including feature coverage in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and CBS. Wise estimated more than 20,000 visitors passed through the show, and many of the objects were acquired by publishing mogul Malcolm Forbes.¹⁶ But perhaps the most important participant flew mostly beneath the radar. While participants with graduate degrees from CalTech and MIT attracted attention for the cutting-edge science on display in their work, Nam June Paik, then a relatively unknown South Korean émigré on the periphery of the Zero circle, sent *Electronic Blues*, a television modified to produce abstract visualizations that could be directly controlled by the viewer.

A Creative Medium

The move to television would be enormously consequential for Wise, who had been searching for the salient link between the audiences of today and the scientific-creative nexus of tomorrow. Television was both an obvious and a counterintuitive choice. In the middle of the 1960s, the medium of television was cresting over an adoption curve that dwarfed the introduction of any other consumer technology. Over the course of 1950s and '60s, the number of American households with at least one television set went up by an astounding 5,000 percent, with newly tuned-in customers reached by a tenfold increase in the number of television stations absorbing a thirtyfold increase in advertising dollars.¹⁷ However, this unprecedented cultural shift catalyzed significant anxiety about the tightening grip of corporate and government control, and few serious artists or intellectuals considered the pablum of network television to hold any redeeming cultural value. There was however, at least one prominent voice of televisual optimism, the Canadian media theorist Marshal McLuhan. Indeed, McLuhan's widely read 1964 book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* set many of the terms under which the debate over the nature, meaning, and implications of a televisual society would unfold.

McLuhan maintained that the dramatic adaptation of television was little cause for alarm; it was simply the latest new medium that surpassed predecessors by incorporating their most fundamental features. At its deepest level, television offered a tertiary encapsulation of the fundamental medium

16. Rivers Ryan, "Wise Lights."

17. William L. O'Neill, *American High: The Years of Confidence, 1945–1960* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 80.

of (electric) light, which for McLuhan represented the possibility of “pure information.”¹⁸ This widely repeated ascription aligned with, and probably informed, Piene’s aspiration for “a zone of silence and of pure possibilities” through the presentation of electric light. *Understanding Media* also contained numerous other impactful observations and aphorisms. He insisted that “the medium is the message”—that technical channels of communication may provide such a determinant context that it actually constitutes the message. One may think, for example, of the recent election of JFK as the first “television president,” one whose popularity with voters had as much to do with his congenial televisual presence as with his policies. *Understanding Media* also contained the first usage of McLuhan’s piquant term “the Global Village”—a concept meant to denote an international cultural and political harmony that would emerge from the affordances of instantaneous telephonic and televisual communication.

As has been extensively documented, McLuhan’s ideas had a deep impact on Wise, and by extension, the broader media arts ecosystem. His influence first became overt in *TV as a Creative Medium*, a landmark exhibition that featured a dozen artists, many of them alumni of *Lights in Orbit*. The exhibition catalog opened with Wise’s claim that “ever since Marshall McLuhan has become a household name, people have become aware of the tremendous force . . . that TV is having in our lives,” arguing that “the relationships between nations, classes, generations and individuals” were all being radically altered by the new televisual world. Wise and his artists saw their mission as marrying the transformational scale of this new technology with the potential for psychological and cultural uplift inherent in art. Paik was particularly direct on this point, emphasizing in his artist statement that his goal was to “humanize the technology.” He envisioned creating silent TV stations that would “soothe every hysteric woman” and “calm down the nervous tension of every businessman” through the broadcast of pleasing electronic abstractions “to be looked at exactly like a landscape . . . or [a] beautiful bathing nude of Renoir.” These same sentiments were also expressed more elliptically by participating artist Aldo Tambellini, who aimed for his televisual abstraction to open up “some creative aspect not belonging to one particular class but towards a new exploration which is for all.”¹⁹ A Global

18. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, reprint ed. (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1994), 8.

19. Howard Wise et al., “TV as a Creative Medium,” exhibition brochure, 2, 3, 8. Accessible on the EAI website at <https://www.eai.org/webpages/1004> (accessed 10/30/2020).

Village to be actualized through radical abstraction of the picture-making capabilities of television.

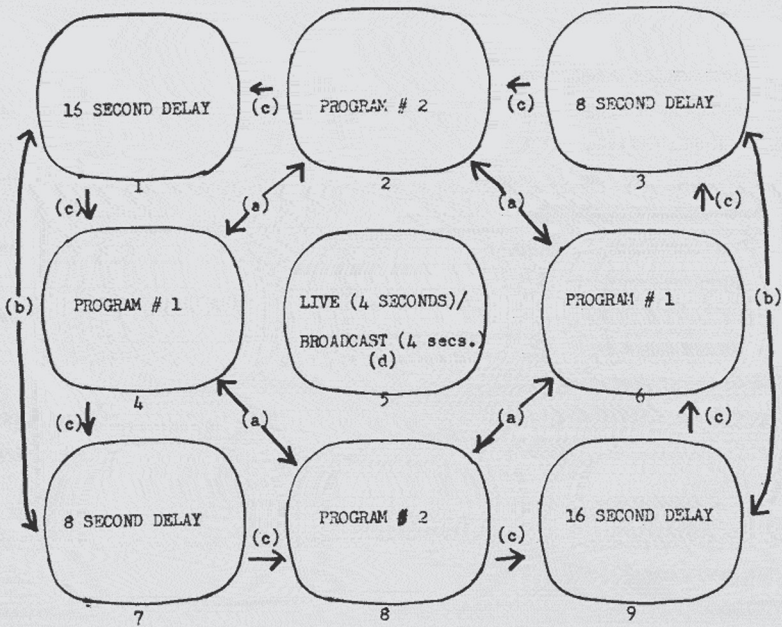
While it did not quite reach the popular apex of *Lights in Orbit, TV as a Creative Medium* had a monumental impact on the media arts community. As the artist Davidson Gigliotti argued, “*TV as a Creative Medium* was a catalytic event around which a video art community began to coalesce . . . after the show at the Howard Wise Gallery, it was possible to identify oneself as a video artist, and to recognize other video artists.”²⁰ The show was anchored by a number of pathbreaking works. While Paik extended his prior interactive abstractions, his best-remembered contribution came in collaboration with Charlotte Moorman, a highly regarded experimental cellist and founder of the Annual Avant Garde Festival. With Paik, Moorman restaged an infamous topless performance that had previously led to her arrest; on reprise she wore a brassiere designed by Paik that featured a pair of small televisions. While Paik and Moorman’s *TV Bra for Living Sculpture* is now one of the most recognizable media artworks of the decade, viewers at *Creative Medium* were more likely to be overawed by Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider’s *Wipe Cycle*, a nine-screen television “mural” that wove a tapestry of imagery through a dizzying circuit of “synchronized cycle patterns” that unfolded “three separate points in time” and “five exchanging points in space.”²¹

These daringly complex constructions would not have been possible without a pair of interrelated developments, both of which occurred only a few years prior to the show’s launch. The first, much better analyzed in the extant literature, was the American release of the Sony Portapak camera—the first battery-operated video camcorder targeted at the consumer market.²² This newly portable camera released what was referred to as the “miracle of videotape” from the monopoly of corporate control, giving artists and other private individuals a portable device to record moving images onto a substrate, one that had two marked advantages over traditional film. First, unlike film, which requires expensive, laborious processing, video footage was available for immediate playback. Second, videotape can be recorded and reused, lowering costs and opening up potential for creative remixing. While artists had been modifying televisions for at least the better part of the decade,

20. Quoted in Sturken, “TV as a Creative Medium,” 5.

21. Wise et al., “TV as a Creative Medium,” 6.

22. The foundational study here is David Joselit, *Television Against Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 91, 99.



- CYCLE (a) Monitors 2, 4, 6 and 8: Programmed change cycle, Program No. 1 alternating every eight seconds with Program No. 2.
- CYCLE (b) Monitors 1, 3, 7 and 9: Delay change cycle, Nos. 1 and 7 and 3 and 9 alternating (exchanging) every four seconds.
- CYCLE (c) Monitors 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9: Wipe cycle, grey "light" pulse, moving counterclockwise every two seconds.
- CYCLE (d) Monitor 5: Live cycle, four seconds of live feedback alternating with four seconds of broadcast television.

Diagram for Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider's *Wipe Cycle* (1969). (Image courtesy Frank Gillette.)

such constructions were starkly limited by their inability to accept as input anything other than signals available for broadcast at any given moment.²³ Video camcorders recording on tape lifted this limitation—enabling both the production of complex works such as *Wipe Cycle* that remix footage from a variety of sources as well as the stable preservation of any moving images produced on or for a screen. These capabilities—portable recording, direct playback, iterative reuse, and (comparatively) easy storage and copying—came to ground the essential features of a new mode of art-making as one that seemed to recognize itself, as Gigliotti put it, first through the activity of Howard Wise.

The Public Option

Wise's *Creative Medium* was also made possible—albeit still indirectly—by a second development that would be produce consequences at least as foundational as the advent of consumer video technology. In the mid to late 1960s, an ascendant grant-making infrastructure began to turn its attentions to the possibilities of artists working with the tools of TV and video. Within this landscape, three funders predominate: the New York State Council on the Arts, founded in 1960 with the backing of Governor Nelson Rockefeller; the National Endowment for the Arts, launched in 1965 by President Lyndon Johnson; and the Rockefeller Foundation, a private entity begun in 1909 with \$50 million (about \$1.5 billion when adjusted for inflation) of Standard Oil stock.²⁴ Although the government entities would take several years to directly fund projects and venues in the video art space, the necessary pre-conditions were already emerging by the period under consideration.

At the state level, the NYSCA budget began to soar in the lead-up to *Creative Medium*. After operating for the first half of the decade with approximately half a million dollars annually, 1967 saw the allocation shoot up to just over \$2 million. In 1970–71, the budget increased by an order of magnitude, to \$20 million per year. This extraordinarily flush situation was such that, as Gigliotti described it, “nearly every embryo video group in the state of New York had applied to the New York State Council on the

23. Helen Westgeest, *Video Art Theory: A Comparative Approach* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 87.

24. For more on the origins of NEA and NYSCA, see Anna Rosser Upchurch, *Origins of the Arts Council Movement: Philanthropy and Policy* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2016), 168–91; for Rockefeller Foundation, see Ron Chernow, *Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller, Sr.* (New York: Random House, 2004), 563–66.

Arts for money with a reasonable expectation of getting some.”²⁵ During the 1960s, the NEA was undergoing a similar period of ramp-up. During its first year, the Endowment sponsored projects including public television stations interested in expanding the reach of their arts broadcasting and a new initiative dedicated to preserving and disseminating important moving-image works. The NEA also funded boundary-pushing contemporary artists such as Dan Flavin, who were directly engaged with electric, if not yet electronic, media.²⁶

By contrast, the Rockefeller Foundation seemed to be almost out ahead of the media-art world itself. The Foundation had been a long-standing patron of individual artistic initiatives, but it first formalized arts activities as an area of focus in 1963. By the middle 1960s, its leadership began to consider the medium of television as a means to scale cultural impact, and the Foundation began to finance televised performances and rehearsals from leading cultural venues. In 1966, Rockefeller ratcheted up its funding for public television by an order of magnitude—granting \$150,000 to the San Francisco-based KQED for a broadcast production of Paul Foster’s play *Heimskringla*.²⁷ This major grant became a precedent-setter as the Foundation brought on a new advisor to oversee its outreach to what, at the time, was still considered an electronic expansion of the traditional performing arts. But as McLuhan insisted, the power of the technological channel of communication always entailed the potential for the medium to rise to the level of the message itself.

Howard Klein was, at first blush, an unlikely ally to the world of media art. A conservative-leaning classical music critic at the *New York Times*, his limited encounters with the world of the technological avant-garde were

25. Davidson Gigliotti, “A Brief History of Raindance.” Accessible on the Raindance website at <https://radicalsoftware.org/e/history.html> (accessed 10/30/2020).

26. “1967 Annual Report,” National Endowment for the Arts, 41–42, available at <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/NEA-Annual-Report-1967.pdf> (accessed 3/29/18). “To Promote and Preserve: The NEA Helps Found the American Film Institute,” National Endowment for the Arts, available at <https://www.arts.gov/article/promote-and-preserve-nea-helps-found-american-film-institute> (accessed 3/29/18). “National Endowment for the Arts: A History, 1965–2008,” National Endowment for the Arts, 22, available at <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/nea-history-1965-2008.pdf> (accessed 3/29/18).

27. And underappreciated but pivotal study of the influence of Rockefeller money on media art may be found in Marita Sturken, “Private Money and Personal Influence: Howard Klein and the Rockefeller Foundation’s Funding of the Media Arts,” *Afterimage* 14, no. 6 (January 1987), easily accessible at the Vasulka’s archive: www.vasulka.org/archive/Publications/FormattedPublications/KleinRockAll.pdf (accessed 10/30/2020).

marked by strong distaste. He had penned a blisteringly negative review of Paik's 1965 performance at Moorman's Annual Festival, disparaging Paik's association with the suspect "Neo-Dada movement" and insisting that despite their "pretensions of profundity, Mr. Paik's efforts lacked any spark of originality, sensitivity or talent."²⁸ Paik, however, was able to change Klein's mind after meeting the critic in person in 1967. With his familiarity with European avant-garde music, Paik was able to help close the gap between the freewheeling ferment previously witnessed at the Moorman's Festival and the internationally recognized experiments in technology-based music produced by composers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen, with whom Paik had studied at the prestigious Darmstadt Summer School in 1958. Shortly after their meeting, Klein changed his tune completely. Already an advisor to the Rockefeller Foundation, he told an internal interviewer that "NJP is obviously brilliant. He is artistically sensitive and may be years ahead of his generation. . . . I would recommend we find some way of supporting his work."²⁹ Ways were soon found. A small pilot grant of \$550, produced the same month as the interview, was soon followed by a substantial sum of \$13,750, given to the State University of New York at Stony Brook to underwrite Paik's services as "consultant in communications research."³⁰

Institutional largesse soon followed. During the same fiscal year, the Foundation poured more than \$400,000—over \$2 million adjusted for inflation—into programming at WGBH–Boston and KQED to support, in the words of the foundation's annual report, "bringing artists and writers into association with television production staffs to explore new ideas and experiment with technical novelties."³¹ Notably, these two awards in support of video experimentation nearly equaled the entire contemporaneous budget of the NYSCA, which at the time was the second-biggest funder of avant-garde media art behind the Rockefeller itself. Importantly, Klein viewed the philanthropic work as a research-driven complement to the public-broadcast funding already available. As he told an interviewer

28. Howard Klein, "Music: 'A Happening' Opens a Festival," *New York Times* (August 26, 1965), quoted in Sturken, "Private Money and Personal Influence."

29. Allan Kaprow Klein and Nam June Paik, August 10, 1967, "SUNY—Stony Brook, Nam June (Video Artist), 1967–68," box 423, series 200R, Record Group 1.2, Rockefeller Foundation Archives. Quoted in Margot Bouman, "A Broken Piece of an Absent Whole": Experimental Video and Its Spaces of Production and Reception," PhD dissertation (University of Rochester), 2008, 37.

30. Sturken, "Private Money and Personal Influence."

31. "1967 Annual Report," Rockefeller Foundation, 125, available at <https://assets.rockefellerfoundation.org/app/uploads/20150530122240/Annual-Report-1967.pdf> (accessed 3/29/18).

in in 1986, “Ford Foundation made the public television system, for all its weaknesses and strengths. . . . If we [were] going to work in television, we really should support artists’ research in television. So that is what we started doing in 1967.”³² The results of that research, however, were nevertheless intended for broad public consumption, and Rockefeller funds required regular experimental broadcasts aimed at stoking the public interest in the aesthetic potential of a ubiquitous, but heretofore largely homogenous, industrial media form.

This philanthropic wave would wash up to Wise’s doorstep through *TV as a Creative Medium*. Six months before Wise’s show opened, WGBH presented the public results of its Rockefeller-funded residency in a two-hour program entitled *The Medium Is the Medium*, a teleological twist on McLuhan’s famous aphorism. WGBH presented videos by six artists: Paik, Peine, Tambellini, Beat luminary Allen Ginsberg, and two media artists less well remembered today, James Seawright and Thomas Tadlock. Out of the eleven works on view at *TV as a Creative Medium*, four were borrowed directly from projects that had been screened by WGBH.³³ Indeed, this wellspring of institutional money perhaps convinced Wise that a different kind of organization was needed to realize his coalescing vision. Just six months after this celebrated exhibition, Wise would permanently close his second gallery space. In an open letter, he explained his “paradoxical” decision to end operations “at the height of the Gallery’s success.”³⁴ His most important motivating factor, as he described it, was the fact that his most ambitious artists were “focusing their energies on works of such scope that these can only be hinted at in the Gallery, and cannot be shown or realized here.” It became clear that a new paradigm was needed, one that would move beyond the institutional configuration of a brick-and-mortar gallery generating revenue through object sales.

It should be noted that Wise did have some success as a commercial dealer—brokering Paik’s first sale, and placing various other pieces in the hands of early media-art collectors, including J. Patrick Lannan, Malcolm

32. Sturken, “Private Money and Personal Influence.”

33. For an excellent overview of this program, see James Nadeau, “The Medium is the Medium: the Convergence of Video, Art and Television at WGBH (1969),” MS thesis (Comparative Media Studies, MIT, 2006), available at <https://cmsw.mit.edu/the-medium-is-the-medium/> (accessed 3/29/18).

34. Howard Wise, gallery closure letter, available at https://www.eai.org/user_files/supporting_documents/HWgalleryclosing_B.pdf (accessed 10/30/20).

Forbes, and real estate magnate David Bermant.³⁵ Such sales, however, were far from reliable. In 1969, Wise gave an interview to curator Elayne Varian, explaining with singular candor the financial underpinnings of his operation. To Varian, Wise emphasized the sporadic nature of acquisitions, characterizing the recent placement of a video sculpture as “an exception to the rule, because it really did sell.”³⁶ Private patronage in the inchoate terrain of video art had significant drawbacks even beyond the limited collecting pool. Wise’s few clients were almost exclusively interested in what could be characterized as TV-sculpture, rather than the freestanding artist videotapes that had emigrated from WGBH to Wise’s gallery. These sculptural constructions, like Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider’s *Wipe Cycle*, were expensive to create, fragile to move, and, given their esoteric fabrication, often difficult or impossible to repair. Only one admittedly ambitious example, *Wipe Cycle*, required extensive custom circuitry, and \$10,000 of financing from Wise,³⁷ but it was far from an outlier. Wise recounted to Varian that “every artist I show” needed advance production costs of “anywhere from five hundred to several thousand dollars.”³⁸ And when one considers that Wise mounted new shows on a nearly monthly basis for over a decade, with each exhibition featuring a dozen or more works, it becomes clear that Wise faced a similar situation to Dwan: material and labor costs for an ever-more-ambitious stable of artists growing with no upward bound.

But unlike Dwan’s *Earthworks*, the projects financed by Wise could never be recouped through a single audacious sale or external commission. Bermant recalled that Wise was “an eminently fair dealer,” who charged between \$2,000 and \$6,000 for objects at a time when a new Jasper Johns painting (constructed out of stable, inexpensive materials) would sell for nearly ten times that amount.³⁹ Moreover, the mechanical and technological instability of these works foreclosed institutional homes for them, either through sale or donation. Media-art historian Edward Shanken has examined in depth the pervasive reticence regarding museum participation in the early days of the art and technology movement, reticence stemming from uncertain or expensive conservation efforts needed to steward such objects into per-

35. Sturken, “TV as a Creative Medium,” 6.

36. Elayne Varian transcript of an interview with Howard Wise in Exhibition records of the Contemporary Wing of the Finch College Museum of Art, Archives of American Art.

37. Gigliotti, “A Brief History of Raindance.”

38. Varian, “Howard Wise Interview.”

39. Sturken, “TV as a Creative Medium,” 6.

petuity.⁴⁰ Wise felt this resistance acutely, recounting to Varian his unsuccessful efforts to require museums to pay commissions to the artists whose work they borrowed from his gallery (but inevitably failed to buy). Such a situation illuminates another point of unfavorable comparison with Dwan, who also inherited title to her unsold works but was able to avail herself of museums and foundations to serve as long-term caretakers. Wise bemoaned this situation to Varian, explaining that when a complex work failed to sell, “I can’t even store it. What really happens . . . [is] it’s dismantled and we forget about the past.”⁴¹ Beyond the economic waste, such real-time erosion of artistic heritage would never permit the scale of cultural and historical impact to which Wise and his roster of artists aspired. This configuration—a received gallery model, placed in a physical showroom, with cash flow generated through object placement—was simply the wrong mechanism to support work in this nascent domain. As such, Wise closed his 57th Street venue to start a new kind of organization that would be addressed to the singular possibilities, and the unique obstacles, of an emerging field in which he had already become a leader.

THE HOKKADIM PRECEDENT

Wise closed the gallery at the end of 1970 and would charter EAI in August 1971, spending the intervening months working to realize *The Electronic Hokkadim*, a pilot program he co-organized with artist Douglas Davis.⁴² *Hokkadim* entailed a new premise for an exhibition, which was set up as a collaboration between the Corcoran Gallery of Art and the WTOP, the Washington DC–based public television station. The Corcoran atrium hosted not a physical installation, but a broadcasting setup for a television program, one that would air for thirty minutes on the evening of June 12, 1971.⁴³ The project drew on a litany of media and art personalities—including

40. Edward A. Shanken, “Art in the Information Age: Cybernetics, Software, Telematics, and the Conceptual Contributions of Art and Technology to Art History and Aesthetic Theory,” PhD dissertation (Duke University, 2001), 137.

41. Varian, “Howard Wise Interview.”

42. The title originated from what Davis has described as the “ancient African word ‘Hochet,’ which describes a ritual form of participative music.” See Douglas Davis, “The Work of Art in the Age of Digital Reproduction (An Evolving Thesis: 1991–1995),” *Leonardo* 28, no. 5 (1995): 386. A more likely origin: “hochet” is the French word for rattle, which would have been in common usage to refer to drumming activities in French-speaking West Africa.

43. For more on this event, see Roy Ascott, *Telematic Embrace: Visionary Theories of Art, Technology, and Consciousness* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 57.

Ginsberg, WGBH engineer Fred Barzyk, and Wise himself, alongside Bruce Nauman, one of Leo Castelli's most promising post-Pop generation artists and the first to make serious use of a Portapak that Castelli had purchased for his stable. This motley selection of writers, artists, and curators would appear either in person or via tele-mediation on the monitors arranged in the atrium.

During the broadcast, this footage would be remixed by an experimental kind of device dubbed a "video synthesizer," a playback and editing mechanism capable of generating wild abstractions derived in real time from incoming video footage. In *Hokkadim*, two such devices were employed, one designed by Paik (in collaboration with engineer Shinzo Abe) and one by the artist Eric Siegel, which Wise would eventually help to patent. Both of these synthesizers had made their public debut in *Creative Medium*, but the *Hokkadim* provided a platform for a novel application of this technology. The results produced by these synthesizers would be determined by large-scale public participation, both from the live audience in the museum and, in a noteworthy first, by viewers at home telephoning in to the broadcast center.

It should be noted that while the configuration of interactive-broadcast-museum art was originary, shades of other elaborative, multifocal televisual performances linger just out of view. Indeed, *Hokkadim* may be thought of as a native art-world expression of the ascendant idiom of spectacularized screen consumption. Precedents for this mode of interaction notably began to gain currency in the preceding decade, with examples ranging from IBM's gargantuan theatrical presentation at the 1964 World's Fair to Douglas Englebart's 1968 "mother of all demos," which introduced the graphical user interface and mouse control to public audiences. Previously framed as a one-way channel for disseminating content in a domestic space, the television screen was becoming reconfigured as a kind of public site, one that could support both the overawing ambitions to monumentality more typically associated with public architecture and the interpersonal interaction that has come to constitute, in the much more recent past, public discourse mediated by and through the screen.⁴⁴

Although these touchstones linger only in the subtext, Wise laid out the goals and the stakes of *Hokkadim* in the grandest possible terms. In his opening lecture, he insisted that commercial television was in its present configuration a "a sleeping idiot infant giant" that had served primarily to stupefy

44. John Harwood, *The Interface: IBM and the Transformation of Corporate Design, 1945–1976* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 103–7; Lev Manovich, *Software Takes Command* (New York: A&C Black, 2013), 72–74.

the American populace at the most important crossroads in its history, the civilization-imperiling conflict of the Cold War. But Wise argued that the almost gravitational attraction of the populace to the glowing phosphor screen represented an enormous opportunity for artists to turn the device into a “useful servant of Humanity.”⁴⁵ In this context, this meant disrupting the usual flow of televisual images on two levels: introducing visual vocabularies of color and abstraction typically associated with experimental art, and creating new interfaces by which users could gain direct user control over the contents of their screen. These two interconnected goals—disrupting the smooth flow of commercial images through an avant-garde glitch aesthetic, and giving viewers the tools to be, in 21st-century parlance, content creators rather than simply image consumers—would become increasingly important to Wise’s activities over the course of the 1970s.

Given its radical aims and status as Wise’s first major postgallery undertaking, it is important to attend to the “business model” of *Hokkadim*. First, *Hokkadim* had a considerably lighter footprint than the Howard Wise Gallery: no finicky video sculptures to maintain, no rent to pay, and no skeptical patrons to implore. Second, a public profile was already baked into the format—a time-limited exhibition that existed both in the rarified space of the museum and over freely accessible airwaves. Third, such a configuration opened up the possibility of drawing support from multiple backers rather than exclusive buyers. The exhibition’s press release attests to a such a piecemeal approach to fundraising.⁴⁶ The lone itemizable contribution came from the NEA, which noted in its annual report that it had supported “the first attempt anywhere at two-way television,” for the modest sum of \$4,000.⁴⁷ Several private individuals also contributed funds—Wise himself, as well as the famously eccentric dealer/patron Reese Palley and the deeply powerful Leni Stern, whose private museum had merged with the Corcoran itself only three years prior. Institutional support emerged from a similarly broad range of sources. Corporate donations came from industrial giant General Electric and small consumer outlets such as CTL Electronics

45. Howard Wise, “The Electronic Hokkadim,” available at http://www.eai.org/user_files/supporting_documents/electronic_hokkadim.pdf (accessed 3/29/18). See also Joseph D. Ketner, *Witness to Phenomenon: Group ZERO and the Development of New Media in Postwar European Art* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2017), 270.

46. Howard Wise, “Official Program of the Electronic Hokkadim,” accessible on the EAI website at <https://www.eai.org/supporting-documents/391/w.1248.0> (accessed 10/30/2020).

47. “1971 Annual Report,” National Endowment for the Arts, 65, available at <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/NEA-Annual-Report-1971.pdf> (accessed 3/29/18).

and Adwar Video. Significantly, other nonprofit entities, including WGBH and the California Institute of Arts, also contributed funds. While many of these features—limited overhead, production and distribution capabilities supporting an unlimited number of works, dissemination through channels with extant public profiles—would resurface in Wise’s future activities, it is this last idiom, of the *re*-granting organization, that would have the most profound consequences for EAI.

LEADING FROM THE EDGE

In August 1971, two months after the close of *Hokkadim*, Wise would charter Electronic Arts Intermix, a new nonprofit organization dedicated to, as its articles of incorporation declared, “soliciting, maintaining and accumulating a fund” to “promote, encourage and assist in the advancement and development . . . of artists working in electronics media.”⁴⁸ As Wise noted in the organization’s founding document, these needs were particular to this mode of working, and would encompass territory that in a more traditional medium might be safely taken for granted. While Castelli helped single artists execute work in expensive materials, Wise’s organization would be dedicated to open-ended training and access for a broad artistic community, the members of which held widely disparate levels of expertise in the territory of video and media art. And where Castelli worked to prime the critical apparatus, Wise would need to offer a broad-based educational program so that “the general public, students, educators, art critics and historians of the artists and their work” could gain the critical tools to understand and engage with the work that EAI would incubate.

In 1973, Wise published “At the Leading Edge of Art,” an extended manifesto cum open-funding letter, which delineated the aims and the strategies of the new organization. Revisiting familiar conceptual territory—broadcast television’s tight control over an ever-expanding audience represented a dire cultural need as well as an urgent opportunity for civic- and technology-minded artists—Wise issued an open call for funds. “Imagination and foresight in funding are needed now to see beyond the present,” Wise wrote, contending that “just as the museums and performing arts centers of today depend on the art that was created in the more or less distant past, so the

48. Howard Wise, “Electronic Arts Intermix, INC,” accessible at http://www.eai.org/user_files/supporting_documents/incorporation.jpg (accessed 3/29/18).

similar institutions of the future will depend on the art which is created today.”⁴⁹ These funds would be used to execute a multipronged strategy to cultivate the foundations of an alternative moving-image ecosystem, one engaged with contemporary tools and urgent questions while also addressing itself to the transhistorical seriousness of great works of art. Wise delineated several areas of planned support: research into new tools and channels of dissemination, community-friendly production and screening, and support for both new-event and festival programming.

Wise understood that he was far from alone in this emergent media-art landscape. In “At the Leading Edge,” he noted the recent emergence of “a whole video subculture,” encompassing new organizations dedicated to experimental media in Boston, New York, and San Francisco, a spate of university departments launching new teaching experimental video initiatives, and even a media art journal, *Radical Software*, which had been founded by two alums of *TV as a Creative Medium* and had grown to a circulation of more than 7,000.⁵⁰ This florescence, enabled by the rise of the grant-making ecosystem delineated above, in fact represents only a corner of an even broader bidirectional encroachment of experimental art and research technology. While an overview of this extensive landscape, which would encompass the rise of the enterprise artist-in-residence paradigm at places such as the RAND Corporation and a new academic-industry nexus supporting advances in digital animation and computer graphics, is outside the purview of this chapter, a few touchstones that were closer to Wise’s world merit discussion.

Robert Rauschenberg’s Experiments in Art and Technology (better known as E.A.T.) and the LA County Museum’s Art and Technology program form important corollaries for Wise’s activities from *Hokkadam* through EAI. Both of these other ventures leveraged ambitious public events as the opening salvo of what was envisioned as a long-standing program to support experimental media art. For Rauschenberg’s part, he had risen to artistic prominence through an idiom of aesthetic hybridity—found-object collages, pastiched silkscreens, “combine drawings”—and had developed a prolific multimedia performance practice with composer John Cage and choreographer Merce Cunningham. Riding a wave of recognition in the wake of his 1964 Golden Lion, he extended these investigations into and

49. Howard Wise, “At the Leading Edge of Art,” *Electronic Arts Intermix*, 10 (accessed 3/29/18).

50. Wise, “At the Leading Edge of Art,” 7.

through technological media. In 1966, he formalized a relationship with Bell Labs engineer Billy Klüver, and the pair launched an ambitious slate of programming that would take place over an eponymous *9 Evenings*. Although the event received some external support, it was, according to historian Edward Shanken, “funded largely by Rauschenberg and Klüver themselves,”—including engineering services valued at \$150,000.⁵¹

And though they were mired in technical difficulties, the *9 Evenings* performances were heralded as a critical success and catalyzed the chartering of E.A.T. as a stand-alone foundation. A series of high-profile events soon followed: a 1968 exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum that featured over 100 works produced in response to an open call, a collaboration with the Nehru Foundation on an educational television network in rural India, a headline presentation at the 1970 Osaka World’s Fair with contributions from nearly 70 artists and engineers, and an acquisition package of media artworks assembled for the Moderna Museet–Stockholm in 1971. This extraordinary energy soon petered out: projects designed with partners including the government of El Salvador, the Ford Foundation, the UN, and NASA all failed over the course of 1972–75. According to current director Julie Martin, “after 1974, E.A.T. became less and less active.”⁵² Funding dried up, a problem Martin attributed to an attempt to pursue lines of inquiry across and between many industries, governments, and disciplines at once. Interpersonal difficulties and contrasting visions for the organization surfaced between Rauschenberg and Klüver, with the artist eventually distancing himself from the collaboration. And while the foundation is still in operation, its activities are focused on producing and disseminating information on its role in media-art history.

The gradual fizzle of E.A.T. may be contrasted with the almost-immediate implosion of the Art and Technology program at LACMA. By contrast with the “all of the above” strategy projects and project partners pursued by Rauschenberg and Klüver, LACMA curator Maurice Tuchman envision a tailored program of industry support, with a roster of companies each hosting a collaboration with a specific artist. The program was officially launched in 1967 with forty different corporate partners, with the anticipation of producing a banner exhibition in 1970. But by the time the show actually opened in 1971, only a smattering of projects had made it to the

51. Shanken, “Art in the Information Age,” 78.

52. Brent Edwards, “The Reminiscences of Julie Martin” Rauschenberg Oral History Project, 2013, accessible at the Rauschenberg Foundation website, <https://www.rauschenbergfoundation.org/artist/oral-history/julie-martin> (accessed 10/30/2020).

finish line, and almost all had to be curtailed because of budget constraints or philosophical differences with the sponsor company. Compounding matters, the exhibition opening was subject to stringent protest over the failure to include female artists, and the connection of the industry sponsors to the ongoing conflict in Vietnam.⁵³ No additional projects or exhibitions were to take place until museum leadership resurrected the program under completely different circumstances in 2013.

These event-driven ventures both contrast with one final foil for Wise's EAI: the support for video work undertaken by Leo Castelli. Though he shied away from the technological adventurism of Rauschenberg, Castelli tried to stay connected to the contemporary edges of art practice, a habit that in 1968 led to the purchase of a Sony Portapak video camera. The camera would eventually make its rounds through the studios of many of the gallery's most prolific artists, but its first enthusiastic proponent was the artist Bruce Nauman, who debuted a series of challenging performance tapes synchronously with Wise's *Creative Medium* exhibition.⁵⁴ Over the next several years, Castelli's stable began producing an increasing number of video-based projects, and the gallery began to host the premiers of works by artists it did not formally represent but who were nevertheless a part of its extended orbit. Some of these video-makers, including Peter Campus and Joan Jonas, have gone on to historical recognition as pioneers of the medium.⁵⁵

This energy led to the formation of a joint venture with Sonnabend Gallery to both sell and distribute (via rental) work in this emergent medium. But as historian Erika Balsom has shown, Castelli-Sonnabend Tapes and Films was probably doomed from the start.⁵⁶ Confusion reigned over the status of the tapes themselves—which were initially considered limited-edition

53. For the definitive period account, see Max Kozloff, "The Multimillion Dollar Art Boondoggle," *Artforum* 10, no. 2 (October 1971): 72–76. See also Shanken, "Art in the Information Age," 96–98.

54. Davidson Gigliotti, "We're all Videofreex: Changing Media & Social Change From Portapak To Smartphone" (2013). Posted on the Videofreex Digital Archive <https://videofreex.com/2015/06/22/were-all-videofreex-changing-media-social-change-from-portapak-to-smartphone/> (accessed 10/30/2020). For an excellent period overview see also Grace Glueck, "Videotape Replaces Canvas for Artists Who Use TV Technology in New Way," *New York Times* (April 14, 1975), <https://www.nytimes.com/1975/04/14/archives/videotape-replaces-canvas-for-artists-who-use-tv-technology-in-new.html> (accessed 10/30/2020).

55. Hermine Freed, "Video and Abstract Expressionism," *Arts Magazine* 49 (December 1974): 67–69.

56. Erika Balsom, "Original Copies: How Film and Video Became Art Objects," *Cinema Journal* 53, no. 1 (2013), 106–7.

multiples along the lines of cast bronzes or fine lithographs. The consumer base for such limited editions was quickly cannibalized by the existence of indistinguishable un-editioned versions available for rent. In the absence of reliable patronage, CSTF was soon racking up annual deficits, and despite attempts at reorganization, the joint venture was scrapped in 1985. Many of the works subsequently found their way to Electronic Intermix's Artist's Videotape Distribution, discussed in greater detail below.

While each of these initiatives failed to take root for a host of different reasons, a line running through these counterexamples concerns the misfit between the technologically driven work and the strategy for providing long-term support. While E.A.T. began with spectacular momentum, the extraordinary range of projects it sought to undertake attests to a lack of overarching strategy. Thus, when initial enthusiasm faded, there was little organizational infrastructure to prevent the rapid disintegration of the foundation's mission. By contrast, Tuchman's Art and Technology program evinced a clear strategy: partnership between enterprise and artist to produce both industrial and aesthetic innovation. But the execution foundered because of a lack of alignment over priorities. Each party had a different definition of success, and thus when disputes over resources or ambitions broke out, there was no shared vision in light of which agreements could be negotiated. Finally, Castelli's foray was governed by a strategy he imported from his gallery's other activities: the production of avant-garde work to garner critical acclaim, which would in turn support high-margin sales of other works. But by carving video off as a separate business unit, Castelli required the work in the medium *itself* to deliver these returns. As he soon discovered, the unlimited reproducibility of tape undermined patrons' willingness to pay large sums for ownership, while the market for rentals—which requires high volume to make up for small transactions—was nowhere deep enough to return a profit. Indeed, the mediumistic properties and inherent unit economics of video work seem to demand licensing and rental rather than exclusive ownership, but successfully implementing this model would require, as Wise had already discovered, operating beyond the configuration of a for-profit gallery.

INTERMIXED ACTIVITIES

Wise, on the other hand, developed and executed a clear strategy that aligned well with the needs of the work he aimed to support. He positioned EAI as

a kind of meta-organization that would at once protect the independence of the multifarious video-art stakeholders while at the same time generating efficiency gains that are typically only possible within large organizations. For example, in the fragmented world of the early 1970s, each artist or collective was responsible for managing relationships with government or private sponsors; buying, maintaining, and upgrading their own equipment; negotiating participation agreements with distribution outlets; and keeping track of revenues and expenses with professional accounting procedures. As Wise put it in his initial inquiry letter to the NYSCA,

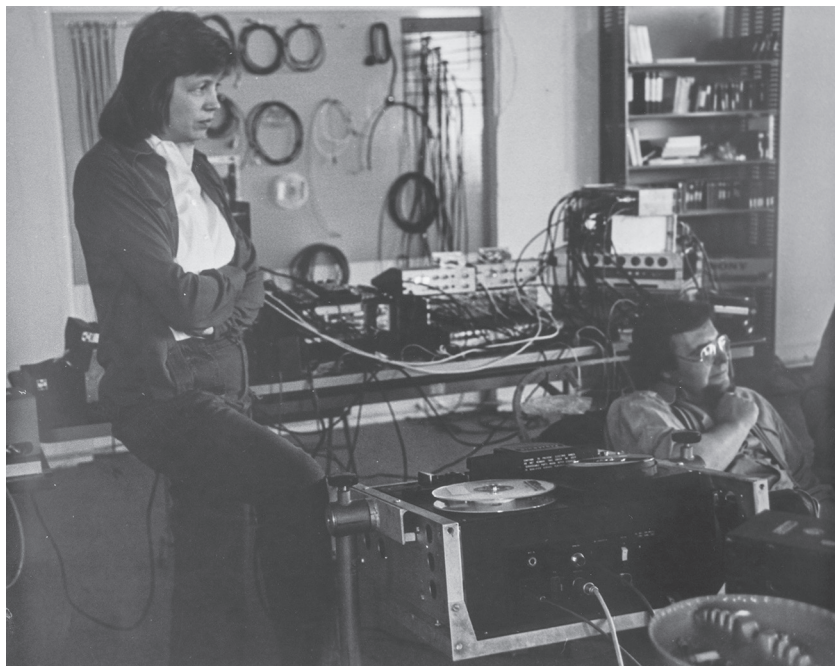
The assistance offered [by EAI] is primarily managerial and takes the form of administrative services, the object being to assure that the projects are run insofar as possible in a business-like manner. . . . Assistance is given in matters such as contracts, accounting procedures, disbursement of funds, assistance in raising funds and in general to assure that funds are expended efficiently.⁵⁷

While Wise did maintain a larger editorial vision for the work supported by EAI, one that could be characterized as a kind of expanded McLuhanism, he avoided the conflicting priorities that doomed Tuchman's Art and Technology program by leaving the implementation of that vision directly to the artists. And because EAI's configuration required Wise to maintain working relationships and close alignment with the scope and focus of grant-makers, EAI never suffered the mission creep that undermined Rauschenberg's E.A.T. These relationships enabled Wise to support video and media art on their own terms and put them on a sound institutional footing away from the pressures of immediate return on investment.

Wise's first major undertaking under the auspices of EAI was to provide assistance to Steina and Woody Vasulka, a collaborative duo who, after immigrating to the United States from the Czech Republic and Iceland, respectively, had become pioneering video artists. Inspired by *TV as a Creative Medium*, Woody applied for, and won, an NYSCA individual artist's grant for a pilot program entitled *Perception*.⁵⁸ Echoing Wise's early exhibition of Kepes, the Vasulkas aimed to use electronic media to probe the limit conditions of the human perceptual apparatus. Their activities were to be

57. <https://www.eai.org/supporting-documents/195/w.1210.0>

58. Lucinda Furlong, "Notes toward a History of Image-Processed Video: Steina and Woody Vasulka," *Afterimage* (December 1983), 12, available at [http://www.vasulka.org/archive/4-30c/AfterImageDec83\(5001\).pdf](http://www.vasulka.org/archive/4-30c/AfterImageDec83(5001).pdf) (accessed 3/29/18).



Steina and Woody Vasulka in the Kitchen, c. 1974. (*Reproduced with permission.*)

headquartered in an arts center called the Kitchen, named for the undesirable meeting and exhibition space in the Mercer Arts Center to which the media artists had been relegated.⁵⁹

In the wake of their successful grant application, the Vasulkas made contact with Wise, who began to offer organizational assistance and guidance as they built up their programming. By the end of 1971, Wise had become something close to a patron of the organization, with EAI submitting applications both to the NYSCA and the NEA on the Kitchen's behalf. When they were successful, and renewed, these funds helped to realize a permanent media production center—including cameras, projectors, and editing equipment, including the experimental synthesizers—that would serve both as a professional studio and a public demonstration center. Indeed, letters from the Vasulkas' archive demonstrate the

59. "The Kitchen: An Image and Sound Laboratory: A Rap with Woody and Steina Vasulka, Shridhar Bapat and Dimitri Devyatkin," 1, available at https://www.eai.org/user_files/supporting_documents/vasulkarap.pdf (accessed 3/29/18).

depth of Wise's involvement in the early days of the Kitchen—coaching the pair through meetings he had arranged for them with grant program officers, and even distributing grant funds on an itemized basis to ensure the smooth operation of the Kitchen's activities.⁶⁰

In an interim report filed with the NYCSA in early 1972, Wise delineated the two primary spheres of EAI's activity: building up the programming run by the Vasulkas, and bolstering Charlotte Moorman's Annual Avant Garde Festival of New York.⁶¹ While Wise's close collaboration with the neophyte Vasulkas demonstrates the depth to which EAI would engage with those its sponsored, his contemporaneous work with Moorman demonstrates the breadth of impact to which it aspired. Moorman's festival had been in mostly annual operation for nearly a decade, and thus, while it did not need the institutional oversight of the Kitchen, collaborating with Moorman gave Wise an opportunity to demonstrate the public impact requisite for the long-term survival of any grant-funded nonprofit. With re-granted funding support from the EAI, Moorman's Festival expanded to an incredible range of projects: thirty-five-foot inflatable sculptures, video-synthesizer displays by Paik and Eric Seigel, performances by music electronic composition pioneer Morton Subotnick and by John Lennon, and motley contributions from dozens of other major international figures, including Joseph Beuys, Bruce Connor, Stan Van Der Beek, and Christo.⁶² As Wise detailed in his report, the public impact of this venture had been massive. Building up the capabilities of the Kitchen had been an expensive, longer-term investment—which necessitated purchasing equipment and paying a permanent staff—and had resulted in programming that had attracted 6,000 participants. By contrast, the Festival was able to welcome 12,000 visitors over the course of a single, one-day event.⁶³ He would go on to support Moorman's Festival for its next six iterations.

Built on such evidence of both breadth and depth, Wise's successful grants began to grow. EAI was first primarily supported by the NYSCA, which granted the new organization at least \$33,000, and as much as \$69,000, every

60. See correspondence between Woody Vasulka and Wise, accessible at <http://www.vasulka.org/archive/Kitchen/KBF2/KBF2.pdf>, and http://www.eai.org/user_files/supporting_documents/HWise_NEA_1971.pdf (accessed 3/29/18).

61. Howard Wise, "Electronic Arts Intermix," 3, accessible at <http://www.vasulka.org/archive/Kitchen/KBF1/KBF1.pdf> (accessed 3/29/18).

62. "Event Program," Annual Avant Garde Festival of New York, accessible at https://www.eai.org/user_files/supporting_documents/3_pgm8th_plans_3.jpg (accessed 3/29/18).

63. Howard Wise, "Electronic Arts Intermix," 3, accessible at <http://www.vasulka.org/archive/Kitchen/KBF1/KBF1.pdf> (accessed 3/29/18).

year between 1972 and 1980. Funds from the NEA were soon providing a supplement—at least an additional \$24,000, and as much as \$50,000, every year between 1974 and 1980. Notably, many of these awards were of a recurring variety; while the NEA did not itemize its awards in annual reports, subsequent NYCA reports list “operating expenses and costs of equipment,” “operating expenses and equipment,” “operating expenses for a video editing and post-production facility for artists,” and similar items for the requisition of EAI funds. Compared with government backing, Rockefeller support was more uneven, with Wise receiving as much as \$24,000 in some years, but in others being turned down *in toto*.⁶⁴ Wise nevertheless found a way to leverage even these rejections. In 1980, Wise wrote to Howard Klein, claiming that after a previous rejection, “you said to me ‘we haven’t forgotten EAI!’” and proceeded to ask “on behalf of the 100+ video artists who we serve” to fund a \$32,000 upgrade for editing and postproduction equipment. The request was funded, albeit not quite to the requested level, during the following cycle.⁶⁵

These funds were used to support a host of initiatives, many of which spawned subsidiary programming of their own. To return closer to the time of EAI’s inception, its foundational work with the Kitchen enabled the organization to become the site of its own recurring annual festivals. Two such examples—the Women’s Video Festival and the International Computer Art Festival—provide an important window into the operative conditions of the early days of EAI. Both were designed to provide a venue for work at risk of being marginalized even with the niche community of video art-makers, but offered different futures for the kinds of vision to which EAI would dedicate support. While the Women’s Video Festival grew out of the larger art-world reckoning with the pernicious effects of patriarchy within its own confines—seen most directly in the emergence of a trajectory of distinctively feminist art in the early 1970s—the Computer Arts Festival represented an ongoing attempt to integrate the most advanced imaging technologies, even those with little public profile, directly into the world of contemporary art and artists.

The first Women’s Video Festival emerged from Steina Vasulka’s realization that, in the ongoing Kitchen programming, women were drastically underrepresented. Accordingly, she asked experimental filmmaker and

64. Figures compiled from NYSCA, NEA, and Rockefeller Reports, 1970–1980, all accessible through relevant foundation websites.

65. “Letter to Rockefeller Foundation.” Accessible at http://www.eai.org/user_files/supporting_documents/14_LetterToRF_1980.pdf (accessed 10/29/20).

Kitchen contributor Susan Milano to collaborate on a recurring screening series featuring videotapes produced by female artists. In the press release for the inaugural festival, Milano and Vasulka noted that video was an ideal medium for female artists; the limited interest from the mainstream institutions of the art world meant that “it lacks a traditional male-dominated structure.”⁶⁶ This comparatively open field provided an opportunity that, Milano argued, it was imperative that feminist artists take up in earnest. By the middle of the 1970s, the second-wave feminist movement was reaching a critical mass both within and beyond the confines of the art world, but, as Milano noted, the outside coverage of this cascade was generated overwhelmingly by male writers, editors, producers, and media executives. Therefore, it was essential that female voices be able to articulate the needs and demands of this movement. This articulation was an ideal target for a new medium that aspired to produce a utopian alternative to the tightly controlled, commercial landscape of corporate broadcasting.⁶⁷

The Women’s Video Festival went on to become one of most successful programs launched by EAI during its early years, and helped to establish video art as one of the most vibrant arenas of feminist art during its heyday in the 1970s. The programming was political from the outset; the first iteration featured work by artists and collectives including Joie Davidow, Shigeko Kubota, and Queer Blue Light Video, addressing topics including rape, abortion, and the unique difficulties faced by lesbian parents. For the followup screening series in 1973 EAI worked with Vasulka and Milano to secure a direct grant from the NYSICA for the Festival.⁶⁸ This grant, which was renewed for the next several years, allowed the Festival to move out from its subsidiary relationship with EAI, joining the Women’s Interart Center. Nevertheless, the Festival remained an important pillar of the coalescing video world, and its reputation helped to solidify the Kitchen, and by extension EAI, as a locus of radical feminist practice.

The long-term traction gained by the Women’s Video Festival contrasts markedly with the initial promise and comparatively short lifespan of the International Computer Arts Festival. Launched almost synchronously with

66. “Women’s Video Festival: Press Release,” the Kitchen, accessible at <https://www.eai.org/supporting-documents/292/w.1234.0> (accessed 3/29/18).

67. Susan Milano, “Introduction,” accessible at https://www.eai.org/user_files/supporting_documents/introduction.pdf (accessed 3/29/18). See also Melinda M. Barlow, “Feminism 101: The New York Women’s Video Festival, 1972–1980,” *Camera Obscura* 18, no. 3 (2003): 2–39.

68. “Women’s Video Festivals 1972–74,” *Electronic Arts Intermix*, available at <https://www.eai.org/webpages/1174> (accessed 3/29/18).

the Women's Video Festival by Dimitri Devyatkin, the coordinator of video art at the Kitchen, the ICAF announced itself to the media art world with an ambitious opening: a three-day series of events in which music, poetry, the visual arts, and even dance had all been re-imagined through the possibilities of the newly emergent digital computer. For example, David Dowe and Jerry Hunt's Harrinan mounted *Heisenberg/Eyes* and *Electric Exo-Sketch*, a performance in which biofeedback from dancers modulated inputs for Paik's video synthesizer, which then replayed an abstracted signal from the dancers' movements in a real-time, liquid-style animation.⁶⁹ Such ambitious, boundary-pushing projects continued through the next two years of the Festival's existence, a span during which it expanded its roster of artists, piloted new workshops, and even inaugurated a public broadcast series. However, the festival never gained any additional traction. It was mired in bad reviews—symptomatic of a pervasive critical resistance to the notion of computers as tools useful to a creative artist—and despite a brief alignment with New York University, no additional iterations of the ICAF were produced.⁷⁰

This tale of two festivals reveals an important split in the unfolding history of the genre form. The WVF connected the video form to the downtown avant-garde, which had a distinctive set of aesthetic, intellectual, and cultural priorities (glitchy or deconstructive visual vocabulary, an alignment with Continental thought, progressive gender and racial politics). The ICAF linked the future of video art to something much different, as the next iteration of a long-standing interrelationship between a society's dominant image-form and its concomitant artistic achievements. ICAF artists sought to deploy cutting-edge technology—difficult, abstruse, heavy, computers that were conceptualized as the pinnacle of mankind's technical achievement—as something that could somehow be harnessed for art-making. Between them, these futures—one of them politically progressive and anti-status quo, the other comparatively conservative and technofetishistic—offered markedly different visions for the role of EAI and the shape of media art more broadly.

We may attribute at least part of the failure of the latter to its disconnect from the cultural and political winds that prevailed on the art-granting landscape of the early 1970s. The opening statement of the 1970 annual report written by Governor Rockefeller expresses with particular clarity the

69. "Official Program: 1973 International Computer Arts Festival," the Kitchen, accessible at https://www.eai.org/user_files/supporting_documents/1973programVA.pdf (accessed 3/29/18).

70. For a representative negative review, see Emily Genauer, "Art & the Artist," *New York Post* (June 21, 1975), 34. See also Taylor, "The Soulless Usurper."

sentiments and priorities that recur in communiqués from the NYSCA, the NEA, and the Rockefeller. The arts were worthy of public support, the Governor wrote, because they “teach us to hear when we listen and see when we look . . . sensitize us, teach us to feel, and in the process, help make more complete human beings.”⁷¹ This vision of arts as both a mechanism of cultural edification and emotional opening aligned well with Wise and McLuhan’s emphasis on technology as an urgent vector to open and harmonize collective belonging. Such collectivity had little use for computer graphics and visualization research as a self-contained exercise, but it was predicated on opening up a new paradigm of belonging. As Rockefeller elaborated, where previous American centuries had entailed the development of “political democracy” and then “economic democracy,” he intended for the NYSCA to help usher in an era of “new cultural democracy.” This new democracy would be mediated by new environments and channels: avant-garde screenings for community filmmakers, formerly “elite” cultural events such as ballets and symphonies opened to new audiences, a generation defining itself through a rock concert at Woodstock. But so too would be this be a new public of the screen; away from the monopoly of corporate control, artists and private individuals would be empowered to generate an aesthetic, expressive, or representational presence within the epoch-making medium of television.

TALE OF THE TAPE

But first, given that there was significant cultural value capable of being unlocked in the media/video-art space, the question remained of how to bring this work into public discourse in an enduring way. What was missing was something in the role traditionally occupied by a gallery: an entity that could centralize the work and thereby move it into the hands of prestige-granting institutions, impact-scaling broadcast channels, and eventually, market-driven patrons. Already by 1972–73, Wise’s EAI had begun to morph into something more concrete than a regranteeing and administrative clearinghouse. It had absorbed the production equipment it had helped the Kitchen to secure, converting it into the Electronic Arts Intermix Editing and Post

71. “NYSCA Annual Report,” 1970, 7. Accessible at <https://arts.ny.gov/sites/default/files/Annual%20Report%201970%20-%202071.pdf> (accessed 10/31/2020).

Production Facility, which offered low-cost video services and training for interested artists.

In 1973, Wise began to attend to the next phase of the life cycle. Building on his efforts to assist video art in the stages of creation (EAI editing facilities) and recognition (its festivals and programs), Wise launched a new initiative designed to help video art gain a more permanent art-historical foothold. As he explained in a statement announcing the Artist Videotape Distribution Service, which began with a roster of twenty artists and a broadcasting partnership with WGBH, Wise's EAI would now be able to "distribute high quality duplicates of appropriate video programs to Universities, Museums, Art and Architectural Schools, Libraries, and other interested institutions" in order to "to promote the concept of presenting artists' video tapes as an integral part of such institutions' continuing programs and curriculum."⁷² By contrast with the ambivalence that marked Castelli's initiative launched the following year, Wise's VDS embraced unlimited, "unprecious" multiplicity—tapes not conceived of as objects for sale, but rather only as a means of loaning the art that resided on them to an exhibition or screening venue, a destination from which the tape was always expected to return.

This breaking of the cherished precedent of uniqueness and originality as preconditions for the work of art cast shades of Benjamin, whose now-iconic "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" was translated into English in 1969 and, appropriately enough, popularized in a 1972 broadcast on (British) public television. For Benjamin, the forward march of technology was serving to vitiate the "cult value" from which works of art had derived their cultural esteem—conditions of historical uniqueness, exclusivity of access, and material preciousness that subtended an ineffable "aura." When likenesses of such artifacts were disseminated through the mechanical reproduction of photography, the original objects were diffused into an endless economy of circulation and thus drained of their auratic presence. Wise's works, however, were not *re*-productions of extant objects. They were in some sense dematerialized, screen-based works that could be contained, but never captured, by the videotapes through which they were disseminated. In this line of thinking, Wise's ideas were much closer to McLuhan than

72. Howard Wise, "Artist's Videotape Distribution Service," *Electronic Arts Intermix*, available at <http://www.experimentalvcenter.org/artists-videotape-distribution-service> (accessed 3/29/18).

Benjamin. For the former, novel media forms never fully supplanted their predecessors. Rather, electronic media absorbed the contents of historical antecedents and proliferated within an ever-more-fragmented media space: television absorbing narrative storytelling from radio and in turn the novel, with all such “technologies” being available to 20th-century audiences.⁷³ In this mode, it is important to note the inflection of the list of destinations to which Wise intended to distribute tapes. Wise’s “Universities, Museums, Art and Architectural Schools, Libraries” had all long amassed collections of artifacts such as books, models, and biological specimens, the multiplicity of which was inherently a nonissue.

But when the value ascribed to uniqueness evaporates (and with it, proximate concerns such as craftsmanship, precious materials, and provenance), the specificities of distribution become particularly determinant for the long-term vector of art-historical reputation. This point is foundational for historian Erika Balsom, whose recent *After Uniqueness* delineates the ways in which film, video, and electronic art have been conditioned by their mechanisms of distribution. While much of the monograph is dedicated to work that postdates the period under consideration, her investigation of attempts by avant-garde filmmakers in the 1960s to reinvent the means by which copies of their work could be disseminated bears important lessons for the present discussion. As she details, filmmakers including Stan Brakhage, Bruce Conner, Jonas Mekas, and Andy Warhol were all deeply invested in new models—such as 8mm film prints distributed by book publishers, or available for sale in record stores alongside vinyl EPs—that form important antecedents to Wise’s VDS.

As Balsom writes, “on the whole, the initiative[s] failed to achieve viability.”⁷⁴ Notably, the filmmaking community had turned to these alternatives in part because of challenges unique to their own idiom, such as unwanted attention from law enforcement that led to the censoring of works and to the police breakup of screenings. Distributing work through semipublic channels and encouraging domestic consumption would allow experimenters to have comparative freedom, but it necessitated cumbersome work-arounds, such as Brakhage’s classification of his work as an experimental kind of pornography. Nevertheless, the experiments in film

73. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 1. See also Matthew Battles, *Library: An Unquiet History* (New York: Random House, 2014).

74. Erika Balsom, *After Uniqueness: A History of Film and Video Art in Circulation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 21.

distribution—which were typically couched in terms of possessive ownership rather than rental—were also frustrated by economic considerations. Other forms of “possessable media,” such as books and vinyl records, entailed high barriers to entry; the music and publishing industries selected a few creators and then promoted and distributed their work at scale. By contrast, experimental filmmaking was by nature an open community of practice that reached an audience that was small, geographically fragmented, and typically without disposable income. And while lower-cost rental might have enticed more participation, the rental model entails its own challenges: maintaining distribution lists and up-to-date inventory, as well as the reverse logistics problem of returned or damaged rentals.

The failure of these experimental filmmakers to reach new audiences through alternative channels points to an important facet of Wise’s success—the address of the VDS not to individual consumers at alternative book or record shops, but to established cultural institutions. Libraries, universities, and museums had reliable budgets, regular programming schedules, and dedicated personnel to whom Wise could address new offerings or opportunities. Moreover, the rental paradigm created a time-limited scarcity that could drive audiences to such venues, while also enabling Wise to centralize inventory and distribution logistics from a single location (rather than dozens of retail outlets). While operating in a much different market and at a completely different scale, this operational advantage was a key piece of the strategy by which Netflix defeated brick-and-mortar video rental outlets before the advent of streaming. Even with these strategic planks in place, EAI was not able to operate VDS as a profit-making venture. But immediate-term profit may be the wrong metric of success. VDS enabled EAI and its artists to gain and then hold traction with institutional audiences. No longer limited to a sixty-minute broadcast or a three-day festival, museum viewers or university students could come to expect a regular rotation of experimental video work over months and years.

FROM MARGIN TO CENTER

The launch of VDS was an important piece of a larger attempt to integrate the activities of the nascent video community more closely into the larger art world. A watershed event in the history of institutional acceptance of video art occurred in 1974 with MoMA’s *Open Circuits*—a three-day event

built on the prior screening-festival idiom, but occurring as a headline event in bastion of art-world authority.⁷⁵ As media artist and historian Ben Portis observed, the event was markedly unusual insofar as it had been planned mostly by external personnel, many of them alumni of Wise's programming, and their "decision to organize a three-day conference instead of an exhibition called on different fund-raising strategies than usually adopted by MoMA."⁷⁶ This funding would of course be expected to emerge from grant-making organizations, and Wise's EAI spearheaded this operation, securing support for *Open Circuits* from the Rockefeller Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the NYSCA.

There are a number of ways to demonstrate the shift that was both announced and generated by *Open Circuits*. The conference proceedings yielded the first heavyweight academic publication in the terrain of video art, published by MIT Press in 1977; by that time, MoMA already hired conference participant Barbara London as its first curator of video art.⁷⁷ *Open Circuits* also helped to solidify Nam June Paik's role not only as a central artistic figure but as a power broker in the emergent video-art ecosystem. His presentation consisted of a preview of *Global Groove*—a magnum opus of remixed footage from an international swath of commercial television intercut with the work of experimental artists and visual effects generated by the Paik-Abe synthesizer. The work would subsequently be broadcast by WNET and, in a sign of things to come, purchased by the Rockefeller Foundation and donated to MoMA as the first video object in its permanent collection.⁷⁸ Gifts from the Rockefeller Foundation also enabled the Whitney Museum to install a specially equipped video exhibition space, and it subsequently began integrating video art into its prestigious Biennale exhibitions in 1975.⁷⁹ Rockefeller funds made it possible for the Everson Museum to hire David Ross in 1971 as the first full-time video curator at any major American

75. Ben Portis, "Douglas Davis and Open Circuits," *Electronic Arts Intermix*, 2, available at <https://www.eai.org/supporting-documents/382/a.271.35>. Organizing partners also included Gerald O'Grady (professor at SUNY–Buffalo) and Willard Van Dyke, a senior film curator at MoMA.

76. Portis, "Douglas Davis and Open Circuits."

77. London's recently published history/memoir provides important context for the institutional origins of video art. Barbara London, *Video/Art: The First Fifty Years* (New York: Phaidon Press, 2020).

78. "Global Groove Object Label," Museum of Modern Art, accessible at <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/107679> (accessed 3/29/18).

79. "History of Film and Video at the Whitney 1970–2009." Whitney Museum of American Art <https://whitney.org/Exhibitions/Film> (accessed 3/29/18).

institution.⁸⁰ This florescence of curatorial activity quickly grew beyond a single source of support. The Walker Museum launched a Film and Video Department in 1973—overseen by inaugural curator John Handhart—and the Carnegie Museum shifted substantial resources to video art with the hiring of curator Bill Judson in 1975.⁸¹

By the end of the decade, the expansion of video art's cultural footprint began to accelerate. In 1982, the Whitney Museum hosted a Nam June Paik retrospective—the first museum solo show of this scale ever given to a media artist—a coup quickly followed by an additional exhibition at MoMA in 1987. That same year, the Ars Electronica Festival, which had launched in 1979 in Vienna, gave out its first Prix Ars Electronica, which since has become the longest-running and most widely recognized prize in the international world of media art.⁸² The declining costs of equipment and an increase in the number of festivals, galleries, and screening venues fed into a larger television and video zeitgeist of the 1980s, a zeitgeist that extended from the commercial rise of MTV to a florescence of experimental practices.⁸³

This same moment witnessed another significant milestone in the story of the artist videotape: its passage into an historical object in need of long-term preservation and care. In 1986, EAI launched its Preservation Program to ensure the long-term viability of the tapes in its collection and, by extension, the stability of the field more broadly. Indeed, videotapes have an extraordinary degree of inherent vice; the materials out of which videotapes are made, and the process through which videotapes are seen, predispose them to rapid degradation and decay. Unlike an oil painting, which when stored under the proper conditions might remain virtually unchanged for many centuries, the quality of the image played back on videotape will noticeably deteriorate after just a decade or two. This deterioration can be caused by either chemical breakdown in the tape substrate or the inevitable disarrangement of the magnetic filings that register the video image, and it

80. "David Ross," Experimental TV Center, <http://www.experimentalstvcenter.org/david-ross> (accessed 3/29/18).

81. Tess Takashi, "Uncovering the Secret History of Video Art at the Carnegie," Carnegie Museum of Art Blog, <https://blog.cmoa.org/2018/01/uncovering-the-secret-history-of-video-art-at-the-carnegie/> (accessed 3/29/18).

82. Noah Horowitz, *Art of the Deal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 40–41.

83. Wise himself was aware of the commercial transferability of this idiom, writing in the introduction to the 1982 VDS catalog that EAI artists such as Siegel, Paik, and Vasulka had developed techniques that "have since been used by network television and advertising agencies, demonstrating their importance to the field." Accessible at <http://www.vasulka.org/archive/RightsIntrvwInstitMediaPolicies/IntrvwInstitKaldron/EAIcatalogue.pdf> (accessed 10/30/2020).

is greatly accelerated whenever the tape is played. Moreover, this physical degradation is compounded by technological obsolescence—a video itself may be perfectly intact, but unless compatible playback device and output screens continue to be available, the video itself will become unplayable.

This instability presents a pernicious obstacle to an entity such as a museum that has an obligation to ensure the long-term safety of the objects in which it invests the financial and intellectual resources of an acquisition. As such, museums remained reticent to actually collect video art, preferring instead to arrange for loans from organizations such as EAI. However, EAI's preservation initiative paved the way for museums to tackle this issue head on. Indeed, there are now major media-preservation initiatives underway at organizations including the Guggenheim Museum, the Smithsonian Institution, SF-MoMA, the Tate–London, and the New Art Trust, a private foundation dedicated to the study and preservation of electronic works of art founded by mega-collectors Pamela and Richard Kramlich in 1997.

By that time, video art had become an undeniable site of curatorial as well as financial investment. In 1998, *New York Times* critic Marina Isola observed that “art on the television monitor has become ubiquitous in galleries and museums,” with installations by major artists now commanding “hundreds of thousands of dollars.”⁸⁴ David Ross, then ascended to the role of director of the Whitney Museum, observed to Isola that the market-driven form had taken over the original utopian aspirations of video art. “Television did provide art in a new medium . . . those who thought that Vito Accornci could go one-on-one with the N.B.A. finals were kidding themselves.”⁸⁵ Ross's observation that aspirational, grant-funded exploration receded in the face of a pressured marketplace has been borne out. In his recent *Art of the Deal*, Noah Horowitz traces an ascendant secondary market for video art since the turn of the millennium. This success has been punctuated by the auction achievements of Bill Viola, an artist whose largely ignored debut at the Kitchen in 1974 gave no inkling that a single video work would net \$600,000 at auction in 2006, which still stands as the record for the highest price ever paid for a video-based work. And while Viola's success is an outlier, Horowitz notes that since the turn of the millennium, his younger contemporary Matthew Barney has achieved auction results in excess of \$100,000 more than fifty times for his video work.⁸⁶

84. Marina Isola, “An Uncertain Market for Video Art,” *New York Times* (February 15, 1998), <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/02/15/arts/an-uncertain-market-for-video-art.html> (accessed 3/29/18).

85. Isola, “An Uncertain Market for Video Art.”

86. Horowitz, *Art of the Deal*, 26. See also the acceptance of avant-garde video in blue-chip art galleries.

This substantial market interest could not have coalesced around the form of video art without EAI, which had built an ecosystem for video art decades before a private market existed. Indeed, recent institutional interest served only to fuel EAI's expansion; VDS has grown from an original suite of 20 works to nearly 4,000 titles by 200 artists as of this writing.⁸⁷ This long-term growth is all the more remarkable in a field in which little private investment, rapidly obsolescing technology, and an ever-changing landscape of artists would seem to create a perfect storm of institutional instability. And notably, Wise was the only figure addressed in the present volume who built an organization capable of continued growth after the departure of its founder.

However, the form of video came to reflect not so much Wise's personal vision but rather the financial and cultural conditions through which he helped to guide the sphere of practice. This directionality is an inevitable result of the particulars surrounding the advent of video art: a condition in which the political and ethical motivations of the artists, the conditions and unit economics of the medium, and the habits of consumer institutions all pointed to grant-funding as the requisite mode of support. It was Wise's foresight and persistence that bridged the gap between these needs and an ascendant grant-making infrastructure. His organization succeeded where others failed through a mix of organizational discipline sufficient to achieve economies of scale and long-term stability, and creative flexibility, which enabled an evolving artistic community to itself drive aesthetic and conceptual exploration. Within video art, both funding and creation were knitted together by the consensus-building needed to win grants, purchase and maintain public equipment, and disseminate work over shared channels. The next chapter explores the obverse condition: what happens when the financial stakes around a kind of art-making grow so large so quickly that they begin to dictate an aesthetic consensus around themselves.

87. "Distribution," Electronic Arts Intermix, <https://www.eai.org/webpages/39> (accessed 3/29/18). See also Tina Rivers Ryan, "Future Formats: How Electronic Arts Intermix Propelled Video Art in a Pre-YouTube, Pre-internet Era," *Document Journal* (September 1, 2016), <https://www.documentjournal.com/2016/09/future-formats-how-electronic-arts-intermix-propelled-video-art-in-a-pre-youtube-pre-internet-era/> (accessed 10/30/2020).

4 ♦ Selling Speculation

Mary Boone and the Roaring '80s

Markets are predictable and risky. Human beings are not used to living their lives under the sign of both.

—T. J. CLARK, 1999

Through the 1970s, the most exciting, boundary-pushing projects in the art world seemed to be transpiring in the space outside of the market. While the previous chapters have delineated numerous ways in which non-sales-driven models are conditioned by financial dynamics, it is true that noncommercial venues had the wind in their sails in this period. The art produced under the auspices of EAI or commissioned by the Dia Foundation was increasingly dominating the public record of critical attention and beginning to assert itself as orthodoxy in the nation's art schools.¹ And yet, Castelli was still doing brisk business over at 420 West Broadway. The gallery continued to expand the reach and ambition of its exhibition programming and repeatedly placed its artists in important museum exhibitions.

And prices charged to Castelli's collectors continued to rise. These increases were buoyed by the now-infamous "Scull Sale," the banner success of which was Johns's *Double White Map*. Scull had initially purchased the

1. For more on the emergence of conceptual art-driven graduate arts education, see Howard Singerman, "Professing Postmodernism," in *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 155–86.

New York Magazine cover featuring Mary Boone, April 1982. (Reproduced with permission of *New York Magazine* and *Vox Media, LLC*.)



painting from Castelli for just over \$10,000 in 1965, and it saw it hammered down for \$240,000 eight years later. The event was capped off by a briefly contentious moment between Scull and Robert Rauschenberg, who shoved the collector in a fit of alcohol-induced provocation. While Rauschenberg accused Scull of profiteering off of honest artistic labor, the artist was quickly placated when the patron gently reminded him that “we work for each other.”² For Rauschenberg and Johns, as well as Stella, Morris, and a select few others, the rising tide of Castelli and Scull was lifting all boats. Indeed, Castelli continued to use non-sale valuations as a testing ground for future price growth. One particularly audacious appraisal from 1976 suggested the value of \$450,000, more than double anything Johns had ever received in his two-decade sales history, for his *Gray Alphabets* of 1956.³

2. Baruch D. Kirschenbaum, “The Scull Auction and the Scull Film,” *Art Journal* 39, no. 1 (Autumn 1979): 51. See also Marion Maneker, “The Famous Rauschenberg Scull Shoving Match Didn’t Go Down the Way You Think It Did,” *Art Market Monitor* (September 2, 2014).

3. Appraisals file, Leo Castelli Gallery Archives, Archives of American Art. Images available on request.

But notably, this upward pull did not extend very far down the ladder at Castelli. At the gallery, artists such as Alan Charlton, Richard Landry, and Billy Apple might be invited for an exhibition or two, but none were offered the chance to join the permanent stable, and few are recorded as having generated any substantial sales volume.⁴ One could argue that this stagnancy was an additional factor driving the coeval rise of alternative arts organizations. Talented young artists needed to forge new links to funders if turnover at the top of the market-driven system did not happen quickly enough. Notably, at the time that EAI and Dia Foundation were chartered in the mid-1970s, all of the top spots in Castelli's program were occupied by artists who had debuted on the roster more than a decade earlier.

And if these Pop and Minimal heavyweights continued to cast a long shadow on Castelli's program, the shade loomed just as large, and dark, over the rest of the New York gallery world. While new spaces mushroomed up, few developed any staying power with a collector base. Such was the example of the Bykert Gallery, which opened in the space vacated by Scull's abortive Green Gallery attempt. The venue built a reputation among artists too late to catch the Castelli wave and became widely admired for its rigorous exhibition program. Sculptor Lynda Benglis, who also taught sculpture at Hunter College, doubled as gallery secretary. In need of further assistance, Benglis recommended that one of her graduate students, a young Mary Boone, assume responsibility for additional shifts in the gallery.⁵ The timing was fortuitous; Boone had been looking for a way in to the gallery world after interning with groundbreaking curator Marcia Tucker at the Whitney Museum. As Boone recalls, she had spent a week dusting slides for Tucker when the curator commented, "You know, I think you'd like working with living artists better. Why don't you get a job at a gallery?"⁶ Benglis was happy to oblige, and Boone in fact went on to become the gallery's sole paid employee. She claims to have made one of the gallery's few sales on her first day on the job—to the representatives of Chase Bank, for their growing corporate art collection.⁷ However, the difficult financial landscape of the 1970s eventually caught up with Bykert, which closed for lack of sales in 1976.

For Boone, the gallery's closing had the salutary effect of forcing her out

4. See Castelli Gallery Exhibition Files, Archives of American Art.

5. Eric Fischl, "Mary Boone" interview (October 22, 2014), accessible online at <https://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/mary-boone> (5/30/2018).

6. Fischl, "Mary Boone" interview.

7. Julie L. Belcove, "A New Boone," *W* (November 1, 2008), accessible online at <https://www.wmagazine.com/story/mary-boone> (5/30/2018).

on her own. Two years after her departure, Boone had assembled a team of financial backers—anchored by her attorney Hugh Freund—and opened a space at 420 West Broadway, a tiny ground-floor storefront downstairs from Castelli’s headquarters.⁸ Although sales at the Gallery remained strong, Castelli was aware of the stagnancy at the top of his program. In Boone, Castelli had been gifted a potential ally to help him regain relevance at the cutting edge of the contemporary. Beginning in 1981, the two gallerists began sharing the representation of a young painter named Julian Schnabel whom Boone had premiered. As will be explored further below, Schnabel’s bold, almost overwrought canvases figured as part of an emergent, international trend. In the US and Europe, artists were declaring themselves to be fatigued by the willful obscurantism of Conceptual Art and yearning for the immediacy and tactility of paint on canvas. By the end of the decade, this broad-based “return to painting” would become one of the most recognizable art-historical developments of the last forty years, with the rise of superstar artists such as Schnabel, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Anselm Kiefer, and Francesco Clemente made possible by an almost unprecedented market created around and through their work.

Compared to the kind of art analyzed in the previous two chapters, heroically scaled canvases were eminently saleable objects, and thus the commercial market played an especially important role in shaping both their production and their reception. The contours of this market were driven, or at least epitomized, by the meteoric rise and fall of Mary Boone. In 1982, just four years after opening her space, *New York Magazine* ran a feature on Boone, dubbing her “The New Queen of the Art Scene.”⁹ Its coverage gushed about the gallerist’s success—capped off by an expansion into a luxurious new Soho space across the street—and extolled her brash new sensibility and panache for PR. By the time her gallery had been open for five years, she herself had been subject of at least ten feature magazine stories.¹⁰

Over the course of the 1980s, her stable would grow to include most of the familiar faces of the high-octane commercial market that dominated this

8. Phoebe Hoban, “Mary Boone: The Art of the Dealer,” *New York Magazine*, 30th Anniversary Issue <http://nymag.com/nymetro/news/people/features/2419/> (accessed 5/30/2018). Supplemented by author conversations with Hugh Freund (June 2020) and Mary Boone (December 2018). This interview was among the last Boone conducted before reporting to prison in the spring of 2019.

9. Anthony Haden-Guest, “The New Queen of the Art Scene,” *New York Magazine* (April 19, 1982), 24.

10. Staff, “Julian Schnabel’s Crock of Gold,” *Washington Post* (May 20, 1983), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1983/05/20/julian-schnabels-crock-of-gold/> (5/30/2018).

moment of art-making. Boone exhibited stockbroker *cum* conceptualist Jeff Koons—whose art has become synonymous with the slick commercialism of the “go-go 1980s”—and helped to establish the reputation of former graffiti artist Jean-Michel Basquiat, whose work has attracted a surge of recent market interest due at least in part to his popularity among music moguls such as Jay-Z and Swizz Beats. But, in a seemingly counterintuitive strategy, Boone also supported artists, including Sherrie Levine and Barbara Kruger, who have gone on to become icons of radical feminist criticality. Indeed, the close alignment between their artistic projects and Boone’s overtly commercialist ethos suggests the need to revisit the ostensibly anticapitalist orientation often attributed to their work.

And much as the unfolding of Pop cannot be understood without attending to the business-side innovations introduced by Boone’s mentor and collaborator Leo Castelli, the rise of so-called “neo-Expressionist” painting was intimately tied into the new models of buying and selling that Boone introduced to the art world. Indeed, Boone’s tactics may be considered a direct response to the success of Castelli’s older system. While Castelli focused on broadening the base of the market, Mary Boone sought to raise its peak. Different than the Pop gallery, which eschewed the singular masterwork in favor of the language of the multiple, Boone’s system entailed a return to the heroically scaled unique object, one that would (for a short time at least) be able to bear the weight of intensive financial speculation.

These speculative possibilities were demonstrated to the public in spectacular fashion shortly after her *New York Magazine* encomium. In May 1983, Boone partnered with Sotheby’s on a public auction that would offer Schnabel’s *Notre Dame* (1979), a massive, brushy abstract canvas studded with broken crockery, as its headline lot. This highly publicized event shattered the precedent—first challenged by Scull—that auctions were appropriate only for the work of deceased artists. And while Boone publicly expressed her disappointment that *Notre Dame* failed to cross the six-figure threshold, she must have been not-so-secretly pleased that the piece still achieved a thirtyfold increase from its original offered price at her gallery: from \$3,000 at his solo debut to \$93,500 to collectors from Bethesda, MD.¹¹ Building on this success, Boone continued to work the secondary auction for the rest of her stable, building valuations and inflating prices all along the way. Boone’s business model was premised around the possibility of profit-making at resale, a model that bore out a clear resonance with the fevered world of the

11. “Julian Schnabel’s Crock of Gold.”

stock bubble then taking over a different part of lower Manhattan. In a kind of parallel with Dwan turning a mining fortune to the purposes of Land Art, Boone built an art world that drew both its conceptual foundations, and its source of capital, from the Stock Exchange.

Her clients included options trader Michael Schwartz, asset manager Martin Sosnoff, and investment banker Asher Edelman, an inspiration for Gordon Gecko in Oliver Stone's *Wall Street*.¹² But the industry trade of her customers matters little except as a symptom of the financialization of the primary market that Boone pioneered. Specifically, this period witnessed the introduction of two unique features into the art market that reprised the tactics of Wall Street. The first involves what is essentially a futures contract—a technique employed by traders who believe they can secure a better price today on an item that will be worth more when it is delivered in the future. While nearly every significant dealer constructed a waiting list among their clientele, Boone was the first to allow patrons to place payments for specific pieces that did not yet exist. For Boone, the sale of hypothetical work was justified by the anticipated price gain on the object once it was delivered, a gain realizable, following the precedent of the Schnabel sale, when the work was resold. Because its initial sale might have taken place long beforehand, this second sale could then take place almost immediately after the work's creation.¹³

And as Boone cemented her collaboration with Sotheby's, the auction house was undergoing changes that traced their origins back to Wall Street. Newly arrived majority owner A. Alfred Taubman, a former consumer brands executive and shopping-mall magnate, introduced the practice of selling art "on margin," a tactic that could multiply the impact of the above "futures" paradigm. In the stock-trading world, a margin sale involves a customer taking a loan out from a broker in order to be able to buy more of a stock at one time. The customer is then able to repay the loan by selling the stock at a gain, with her profit magnified by the increased size of the purchase made possible by the initial loan. Similarly, Taubman began the practice of loaning substantial sums of money to Sotheby's clients, sums that could be expected to repaid through a price increase achieved on the secondary market.¹⁴

12. Dinitia Smith, "Art Fever: The Passion and Frenzy of the Ultimate Rich Man's Sport," *New York Magazine* 20, no. 16 (April 20, 1987): 39.

13. Christopher Mason, "She Can't Be Bought," *New York Magazine* (March 7, 2005), [http://nymag.com/nymag/features/112651/ \(5/30/2018\)](http://nymag.com/nymag/features/112651/ (5/30/2018)). See also Don Thompson, *The \$12 Million Stuffed Shark: The Curious Economics of Contemporary Art* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2012), 195.

14. Phoebe Hoban, *Basquiat: A Quick Killing in Art* (New York: Penguin Books, 199), 186.

Indeed, this model echoed the practices of many contemporary traders, whose systems were premised on predictable price increases continuing into the indefinite future. Of course, such bubbles inevitably burst, and the world of neo-Expressionist painting saw its ascent into the firmament begin to reverse course at the end of the 1980s. What began with a series of auction results that failed to meet the minimum agreed price for a sale (a “reserve”) quickly coalesced into a pattern, and then a stampede, of tumbling prices. One of Boone’s artists, the painter Eric Fischl, watched in horror as the prices for his work fell by an astonishing 75 percent.¹⁵ Critics were quick to blame her gallery for pushing hype and sensationalism rather than serious art, hype that had inflated prices past the point of sustainability and tarnished the reputation of the art world more broadly.¹⁶

Boone’s personal recovery from this nadir has been uneven. The standing of her gallery has slowly been rebuilt over the last several decades, but her recent imprisonment on tax fraud charges has probably cast a permanent pall over her legacy. Nevertheless, these more recent scandals should not detract from the historical impact of her early activities. Indeed, the success of Schnabel, Koons, and Basquiat, as well as Levine and Kreuger, set the stage for the exuberance in the contemporary art market that has characterized most of the last decade. In the middle 2000s, the art market finally returned to the heights set during the 1980s, with production and patronage occurring across a far-flung network of geographic centers.¹⁷ While it collapsed under its own weight, the market generated by Mary Boone demonstrated the possibility of developing a model for art patronage that could keep pace with—and draw its energy directly from—the scale and complexity of the contemporary financial system.

TOUGH LANDSCAPE, BAD PAINTING

Nothing resembling this superheated commercial landscape would have greeted Mary Boone when she embarked on her gallery career at Bykert in 1974. The Bykert Gallery had been founded in 1966 by Klaus Kertess, an intellectually minded art-history graduate student, and his former college classmate Jeff Byers. Over the course of the 1970s, the gallery would show a number of important “post-Minimal” artists, including Barry Le Va

15. Belcove, “A New Boone.”

16. Belcove, “A New Boone.”

17. Art Basel and UBS, *The Art Market Annual Report*, 15, 18; accessible online at <https://www.artbasel.com/about/initiatives/the-art-market> (5/30/2018).

and Richard Tuttle, as well as photorealist painter Chuck Close. The gallery built a reputation as a forward-looking, artist-oriented venue in a landscape that sorely needed such an outlet. As Kertess related to an interviewer in 1975, “there were no galleries that were actively looking for new artists or no galleries where younger artists could turn to in the hopes that they would show their work.”¹⁸ Nevertheless, Kertess was never able to get Bykert onto a sound financial footing. He ruefully remembered how the gallery’s balance sheets “wobbled with extreme difficulty on the break-even point, whether or not the rent was going to be paid, whether the electricity was going to be turned off.”¹⁹ According to Boone’s memories, these difficulties were exacerbated by Kertess’s instincts, which were pointed in the wrong direction for a gallery director. He was an astute judge of artistic talent, but chronically disinclined to consider the aspects of career management that would allow him maximize the value of artists such as Close and Brice Marden, who provided the few financial bright spots for the gallery.²⁰ Eventually, the financial difficulties became too much, and Kertess closed the gallery in 1976.²¹

As the business wound down, there seemed to be a chance that Boone might take over. While Boone has claimed that she turned Kertess’s offer down—Kertess insisted that no offer was ever extended—any slim chance that Boone would pick up the Bykert torch vanished when the gallery’s few profitable artists declared that they were jumping ship to more prolific programs.²² Boone tried to find a position at another gallery, but could not find a fit in terms of a livable salary and a shared artistic vision. If she was going to make a name for herself in the gallery world, she was going to have to strike out on her own.

With \$70,000 in seed money from by a small team of investors, Boone rented a small storefront space in the same warehouse occupied by the Leo Castelli Gallery.²³ She structured the venture as a kind of cooperative, in which the initial backers would be bought out with incoming sales, and their equity stakes converted into preferential treatment as collectors.²⁴ At

18. Andrew Russeth, “Klaus Kertess, Foresighted Art Dealer and Curator, Dies at 76,” *Art News* (October 09, 2016), <http://www.artnews.com/2016/10/09/klaus-kertess-foresighted-art-dealer-and-curator-dies-at-76/> (5/30/2018).

19. Russeth, “Klaus Kertess.”

20. Belcove, “A New Boone,” author interview with Mary Boone, December 2018.

21. Christopher Finch, *Chuck Close: Work* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2010), 305.

22. Belcove, “A New Boone”; Russeth, “Klaus Kertess.”

23. Author interview with Mary Boone, December 2018.

24. Author interview with Mary Boone. Also author interview with Hugh Freund (4/8/2020).

first, she struggled to attract other customers. Her initial plan was to build her client list by capturing patrons as they waited for the elevator to Castelli's space, but this, predictably, yielded few wins. Eventually, their shared address would seed an important partnership, but this alliance would take Boone the better part of two years to cultivate.²⁵ Castelli had little reason to pay significant attention to a new neighbor in a building already filled a rotating cast of artists, handlers, packers, and sundry other participants in the art economy. To make her play for the approval that collaboration with Castelli could bring, Boone would need to find something with immediate impact and, ideally, the potential for critical and curatorial validation.

At the beginning of 1978, just as Mary Boone was beginning her first full year of programming, Boone's mentor Marcia Tucker opened an exhibition at the New Museum, an experimental downtown space she created with an NEA grant after she had been unceremoniously fired from her post at the Whitney. Tucker's *Bad Painting* had been conceived in part as a joke—a jab at both her former employer and the overweening conceptual density that seemed to be almost clouding the air of the art world. But Tucker's joke began to resonate with trends that, for their apologists, were deadly serious. At the end of 1978, Tucker's replacement at the Whitney opened a related exhibition—which also featured painter Neil Jenney from Tucker's show—but one shorn of the humorous subversion of *Bad Painting*.²⁶ Richard Marshall's *New Image Painting* argued that the time had come for painting to reassert itself, not simply by returning to abstraction but by absorbing the lessons of the 1960s and '70s to produce something else entirely. Marshall suggested that a new reductionism was needed, one aimed not at purifying the elements of the canvas as a *painting* (pace Greenberg), but rather as a *picture*. What had been discarded under Greenberg's regime, such as narrative elements and mimetic space, Marshall recast as the necessary kernel for a new, revitalized practice of painting as picture-making.²⁷

In the immediate wake of these New York shows, painting exhibitions

Boone claims to have pioneered this system, though its architecture resembles the kind of back-ing used at the origins of Park Place and many other venues.

25. Hoban, "Mary Boone: The Art of the Dealer."

26. For more on the interconnections between these exhibitions see Craig Staff, *After Modernist Painting: The History of a Contemporary Practice* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 83.

27. Richard Marshall, *New Image Painting* (New York: Whitney Museum, 1978). See also Tugshan Hsieh, "The Critical Foundations of American Neo-Expressionism: 1980–1984" (PhD dissertation, Texas Tech University, 1994), 28.

began to make a marked comeback in Europe. In 1980, the Aachen-based museum housing the collection of Peter Ludwig held an exhibition entitled *Neue Wilden* (*New Savages*), which shed light on a growing resurgence of German Expressionist idioms that had seemingly gone out of fashion seven decades before. *Neue Wilden* inaugurated a string of additional exhibitions that led German critic Wolfgang Max Faust to posit that the willful denialism of art in the 1970s had left culture with a “hunger for images.”²⁸ On the other side of the Alps, a new loose-knit group of painters had begun to gather traction with their brightly colored, figurative canvases, paintings that often adapted scenes from wildly disparate historical and art-historical moments. According to the group’s most important theorist, the critic Achille Bonito Oliva, these inventive, dramatic painters were restoring the “giddiness” that had been leached out of art by the economic and aesthetic doldrums of the 1970s.²⁹ While the splashy, overtly pastiche canvases of the Italian *trans-avantgarde* figured differently than the operatic melodrama of the German *Neue Wilden*, the confluence of these ideas with endogenous developments in New York set the stage for a dramatic international groundswell.

With these developments coalescing in the background, Boone managed to identify an artist tailor-made for the moment, a young, brash painter named Julian Schnabel. Different versions of their first encounter have circulated. In one, Schnabel boldly introduced himself to the dealer at One University Place, a popular Greenwich Village hangout, where Boone was a diner and Schnabel was a chef.³⁰ In another version, Boone encountered Schnabel painting a ceiling belonging to the painter Ross Bleckner, one of Boone’s represented talents and a source of many of the gallery’s future leads.³¹ But in all versions, Schnabel was quick to press Boone, whose reputation as a new cast of dealer had already preceded her, for a studio visit. On arriving at his studio, Boone was struck by decorously colorful and highly impastoed canvases, their surfaces built up with dimensional paint and collaged elements. The depicted scenes were almost beyond retrograde—portraits, figure studies, and even still lifes. The bravura presentation seemed to at once affirm and undercut the sincerity of the imagery. If the collage

28. Wolfgang Max Faust, “Hunger for Images and Longing for Life: Contemporary German Art,” accessible in English in *Wild, Visionary, Spectral: New German Art*, ed. Rod Radford (Adelaide: Art Gallery Board of South Australia, 1986), 20–27.

29. Achille Bonito Oliva, “The Italian Trans-Avantgarde,” *Flash Art* (1979): 92–93, at <https://www.flashartonline.com/article/the-italian-trans-avantgarde/> (5/31/2018).

30. Belcove, “A New Boone.”

31. Author interview with Mary Boone, December 2018.

objects of Jasper Johns had, for Castelli, sounded the death knell for painting, works like Schnabel's seemed offer an undead monster, the corpse of the Western tradition reanimated for a new cultural, and economic, moment.

Though she was "immediately smitten," she slow-walked their relationship. She arranged followup visits with advisors including Kertess and the collector J. Patrick Lannan.³² Schnabel, however, would not be put off. With Boone dallying, he threatened to sign with gallerist Holly Solomon.³³ Sensing an important opportunity slipping away, Boone committed to Schnabel and mounted a pair of solo shows for him in 1979. These small exhibitions were a portentous success. Not only did they sell out before they opened—a somewhat less impressive accomplishment when one considers that the first show contained only four works, each priced under \$4,500—they also finally caught the eye of Boone's upstairs neighbor. As Schnabel recounted to an interviewer in 1980, "Well, I was with Mary at that time. She has a gallery in Leo's building. He came down and he saw my paintings and he really liked them. . . . I had never asked him to see them."³⁴ Boone and Castelli, predictably, have offered accounts claiming that collaboration was originally born out of their idea, but no matter whose impetus set the machine in motion, it quickly came to benefit all three. Boone was able to secure the cross-validation she had long sought—akin to being "blessed by the Pope," as one historian put it—while Castelli was able to, at a stroke, retake his position as a leader on the cutting edge of contemporary art. It is no coincidence that Castelli openly spoke of his encounter with Schnabel as the second *coup de foudre* of his career, the first being his fabled encounter with Jasper Johns.³⁵

And it was primarily through Castelli's Rolodex that a real collecting base began to coalesce around Schnabel. Through years of skillful prac-

32. Author interview with Mary Boone, December 2018. Lannan's role here points to a hidden thread running through each of the chapters in this book; his presence as a patron for Castelli, Dwan, Wise, and Boone demonstrates how these dealers operated within what, fundamentally, was the same collector ecosystem. While each brought new stakeholders and models into the mix, novelty was never introduced into a *tabula rasa*. Then as now, the contestation (and collaboration) between new and old models seeking market share, institutional visibility, critical legitimacy, and artistic energy defined the unfolding of history in real time.

33. Hoban, "Mary Boone: The Art of the Dealer."

34. Carter Ratcliff, "New Again: Julian Schnabel," *Interview* (January 5, 2016), <https://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/new-again-julian-schnabel> (5/31/2018). See also Grace Glueck, "What One Artist's Career Tells Us of Today's World," *New York Times* (December 2, 1984), sec. 2, 1–2.

35. Haden-Guest, "The New Queen of the Art Scene," 26.



Julian Schnabel exhibition at Mary Boone/Leo Castelli, 1980.
(*Courtesy Mary Boone Gallery.*)

tice, Castelli knew how to flesh out an ecosystem around these disparate points: who should be sold to at a discount because their connection to a major museum would help Schnabel burnish his exhibition credentials, how quickly one could raise prices, and who could be convinced to pay a premium after the bona fides had been established. Importantly, Castelli extended a practice he had pioneered with Rosenblum and Johns—placing the work in the hands of friends such as critics and allied dealers who would stand to benefit as Castelli and Boone’s new star continued his ascent. This behind-the-scenes maneuvering enabled Boone and Castelli to build her prior, modest success into the first instance of a pattern. Boone’s 1982 *New York Magazine* profile detailed this unfolding with surprising candor: collector Bobby Heller acquired his Schnabel for \$700, then Lannan purchased one for \$12,500, Peter Ludwig paid \$32,000 for his, and then a spate were placed in the hands of powerful, museum-connected patrons, including Eugene Schwartz and Morton Neumann, for undisclosed sums.³⁶ Over the course of 1981–82, Boone moved into an audacious new space across the street—which she converted from its former function as a truck garage—and shared with Castelli a pair of Schnabel exhibitions, both of which were again sold out before they opened.³⁷ Castelli then

36. Haden-Guest, “The New Queen of the Art Scene,” 27.

37. Mary Boone history on gallery website; Cathleen McGuigan, “Julian Schnabel: ‘I Always Knew It Would Be Like This,’” *Art News* (Summer 1982): 88–94.

made Schnabel a remarkable offer. The elder gallerists invited the ascendant painter to officially join his gallery's stable, thereby making Schnabel the first artist added to the Castelli Gallery's ranks in more than a decade.³⁸ And following the paradigm he laid down in the 1960s, Castelli helped to construct a system in which approval from the commercial marketplace and museum institutions helped to reinforce one another.

As Schnabel's unprecedented season was unfolding in New York, another museum show dedicated to the return of painting was being organized in London, at the prestigious Royal Academy. According to its curators, *A New Spirit in Painting* represented the first "time that an international contemporary painting exhibition has taken place in Europe for 16 years."³⁹ The exhibition introduced Italian and German painters to English-speaking audiences, juxtaposing them with leading American figures. A late de Kooning anchored the show historically, and Castelli veteran Frank Stella's brightly hued "protractor paintings" received one of their most prominent treatments. But it was, as curator Sir Normal Rosenthal put it, "a young Julian Schnabel" who pointed the way toward the future.⁴⁰ This arrangement speaks to the continuity of Castelli's market-driven world uninterrupted by the experiments of the intervening chapters—a concatenation of an early de Kooning, a subsequent Stella, and a recent Schnabel opening onto a next chapter.

SECONDARY MARKETS, PRIMARY CONSIDERATIONS

Concomitant with Schnabel's widely reported rise to the top, there were other signs that the dormant art market of the 1970s was beginning to stir to life on a scale heretofore unanticipated. In 1980, collectors Burton and Emily Tremaine made headlines when they worked with Pace Gallery director Arne Glimscher to sell Jasper Johns's *Three Flags* (1958) to the Whitney Museum for an even \$1,000,000.⁴¹ The *New York Times* ran the story of the

38. McGuigan, "Julian Schnabel."

39. Susan Heller Anderson, "'Spirit' Show Highlights Contemporary Painting," *New York Times* (February 5, 1981), 17, at <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/02/05/arts/spirit-show-highlights-contemporary-painting.html> (5/31/2018).

40. Staff, "Interviews: Sir Norman Rosenthal," *Art in America* (September 2009), <https://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/interviews/norman-rosenthal/> (5/31/2018).

41. Malcom Goldstein, *Landscape with Figures: A History of Art Dealing in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 309.

record-breaking sale on the front page, a story illustrated by the original \$900 invoice from the Castelli Gallery. Indeed, the sale shook up public consciousness around the possibility of contemporary artwork realizing staggering increases in value. If the Scull auction had not impressed this lesson clearly enough, the Tremaine sale proved beyond any possible doubt that the significant money in the contemporary art world was to be made in the secondary market, when the work was sold *again* after its desirability had increased. To collect a share of this enormous, and entirely new, terrain, primary dealers would have to find a way to enter the world of secondary sales themselves.

Which is precisely what Castelli, Boone, and Schnabel decided to do. In the spring of 1983, the trio collaborated on a paradigm-shattering public auction in which a work by Schnabel that was merely four years old would serve as the dramatic final lot. Their timing was made all the more fortuitous because of the exigent need for a potential partner. The venerable London-based auction house Sotheby Parke Bernet—which had hosted the Scull sale ten years before—had since been finding itself on an increasingly precarious financial footing. By the time of Schnabel’s appearance on the scene, the auction house was sharing a \$20 billion luxury resale market with only one meaningful competitor, and still managing to lose over \$7,000,000 a year.⁴² Sotheby needed a new revenue source, and needed one badly.

When news of the planned sale broke in the press in early May 1983, the reaction from the art world was polarizing. While some denounced the overt commercialism of the move, the allies seeded by Boone and Castelli were ecstatic. These reactions attest to a deep network of cross-validation that recapitulated the features of the support system built by Castelli on behalf of Jasper Johns twenty-five years previously. Writer Rene Ricard, author of a seminal essay about Schnabel’s painting, exclaimed to a *Washington Post* reporter that “this mean’s I’ll be rich. I own lots of Schnabels.” A second, unnamed contemporary art dealer responded with a similar observation, “This is lovely, this means I will make money on mine.”⁴³ Bizarrely, Castelli at first expressed his disapproval of the auction, responding to an initial press inquiry by insisting that such an early sale “was not good for the artist or the market.”⁴⁴ At some point in the next few hours, he changed his mind

42. Steven Bertoni, “How Former Sotheby’s Boss Al Taubman Shook Up the Art World,” *Forbes* (May 3, 2012), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevenbertoni/2012/05/03/how-former-sothebys-boss-al-taubman-shook-up-the-art-world/#57b4aa544331> (5/31/2018).

43. “Julian Schnabel’s Crock of Gold.”

44. “Julian Schnabel’s Crock of Gold.”

completely. Standing side by side with Mary Boone for a second round of interviews later that same day, Castelli was eager to claim, “we are excited about the sale, not anxious. . . . And we are sure the painting will bring a lot . . . maybe even \$65,000.”⁴⁵ Castelli’s justification for his reversal of opinion was that he had discovered that the prospective auction object was going to be switched out at the last minute. Instead of a picture owned by a third Soho gallerist, Anina Noisei, it would be a one owned by the artist himself.

The last-minute switch—perhaps a concocted PR stunt, perhaps indirect evidence of alliances shifting behind the scenes—only had the effect of amplifying publicity in the lead-up to the auction. Boone actively worked this press to inflate expectations around what the work might realize, which turned out to be a twenty-five-fold increase (\$93,500) from its original offered price of \$3,500. As for the work’s new owners—Burton and Anita Reiner of Bethesda, MD—they were proud of their acquisition. Having been rebuffed several times by Boone in her attempts to purchase a Schnabel, Anita Reiner could finally bring one home. “I’ve loved his work since I first set eyes on it about four years ago,” Reiner told the *Post*. “I think the price was a little steep, but that’s what I had to pay to get one.”⁴⁶ A new strategy—the direct resale of a contemporary work, produced by a unique collaboration with an auction house—had been successfully piloted.

While the record-breaking sale predictably dominated the headlines, it is the texture of the economic infrastructure underneath the eye-popping numbers that concerns us here. Indeed, several key features and fault lines that would define the new landscape were all detectable together in the events surrounding the Schnabel auction. First, the interconnecting web of ownership—with rival dealers all possessing works by the same artist—had created a new kind of motivation for them to work together to continue driving his prices up. But this new configuration contained within it a corollary danger. The collapse of a market around a star artist might normally have only affected a single gallery. Now it was in a position to damage the whole art world. Second, unlike Castelli’s strategy of slow growth in a roster of museum-approved heavyweights, this emerging system would come to demand an evanescent cast of celebrities reselling work on an ever-shortening time horizon. While Schnabel and Boone had broken auction records together, the chance to repeat the success with the same duo would

45. “Julian Schnabel’s Crock of Gold.”

46. Jeffrey Hogrefe, “Julian Schnabel: Smash Hit,” *Washington Post* (May 21, 1983), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1983/05/21/schnabel-smash-hit/4c1b3e5d-0851-424f-891e-81b310d6e30a/> (3/31/2020).

be limited at best. The world of rising prices would perpetually demand a new headliner at the top of the ticket.

Third, the potential value created by the waiting list, a tactic pioneered by Castelli and enthusiastically embraced by Boone, could take on a whole new dimension when the right or obligation to buy something in the future became an uncertain economic proposition. It remained unclear how patrons could ensure that an artist purchased when he was “hot” would retain his value, an especially pressing problem given the need for galleries to turn over artists more quickly. And fourth, as the auction houses themselves became players in this game, they would bring their own financial toolkit into the situation. One tool in particular had the designed effect of untethering price records from the previous constraint of how much money buyers actually possessed. The result was a system in which three different sets of stakeholders all had different needs: artists and dealer were looking to make things happen quickly, buyers wanted things to happen safely, and auction houses wanted them to happen massively.

SPECULATIVE REALISM

The first visible downstream consequence of Schnabel’s auction was his departure from Boone and Castelli’s galleries just before the one-year anniversary of his auction. Gossip abounded over what exactly caused the split—including the rumor of an incredible \$1,000,000 guarantee from his new gallerist, Pace director Arne Glimscher. For his part, Castelli was livid. Perhaps still simmering against Glimscher for brokering the Johns sale to the Whitney, Castelli reported phoned Schnabel, dressed him down sharply for his treachery, and then hung up on him. Schnabel himself offered two related explanations for the switch. While on the one hand, the artist insisted that Pace gallery was “a more stable situation,” further removed from the media blitz and auction pressure of Boone, he also intimated that her strategizing had tainted his public success. “Whether it is Mary plotting or me plotting,” he told the *Washington Post*, “now we’ll know.”⁴⁷ But perhaps the simplest explanation was that Schanbel was just trying to get out ahead of inevitable change. Indeed, after the auction, Boone had been aggressively expanding

47. Jeffrey Hogrefe, “Schnabel Makes the Switch,” *Washington Post* (April 21, 1984), https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1984/04/21/schnabel-makes-the-switch/fecd61a6-322b-4018-bd9a-1dd29148cd42/?utm_term=.2f2cbb085a14

the gallery's program to include the Germans and Italians featured alongside Schnabel at the Royal Academy. It seems possible that Schnabel simply realized it was better to exit Boone before she had the chance to shelve him.

But by the time the Schnabel split from Boone, the gallerist was well on her way to developing a broad-based roster of talent. She had become a leader in exhibiting the German and Italian artists driving the international return to painting, as well as developing her own roster of American talent, including Eric Fischl, David Salle, and Jean-Michel Basquiat. With the possible exception of Schnabel, Basquiat is by far the best-remembered painter of Boone's cohort from the mid-1980s, so no account of Boone's programming during the height of its visibility would be complete without attending to Basquiat. Moreover, while the stormy details of his biography would seem to position him as an edge case, Basquiat actually provides a representative example of the ways in which the financial dynamics of Boone's program matured in the wake of Schnabel's sensational sale and subsequent departure.

Fittingly, Boone actually first encountered Basquiat at the opening of the 1983 Whitney Biennial, which took place less than a week before Schnabel's *Notre Dame* was slated to go up for auction.⁴⁸ Boone must have been impressed both by Basquiat's visceral brushwork and by his singular ascent into the rarified confines of the art world. In the late 1970s, Basquiat had been a free-floating graffiti artist, selling postcards and T-shirts of his work on the street corners of the Lower East Side. A major turning point occurred in 1981 when curator Diego Cortez included his work in a seminal PS1 exhibition entitled *New York/New Wave*. Out of this exhibition, Basquiat began to attract art-world attention: another article by Rene Ricard, a show with the Swiss mega-dealer Bruno Bischofberger, a sale to Met curator Henry Geldzahler, and of course a series of collaborations with Andy Warhol. By 1983, he was the youngest artist included in the prestigious *Documenta* exhibition and represented by the Annina Nosei gallery.⁴⁹

Basquiat had been showing with Nosei dating back to 1981, when he was featured in a sprawling group show that also included future Boone heavyweight Barbara Kruger. Nosei was taken with Basquiat's charisma and his singular canvases, and offered him every means of support at her disposal—

48. Leonhard Emmerling, *Jean-Michel Basquiat: 1960–1988* (Cologne: Taschen, 2003), 64.

49. Cathleen McGuigan, "New Art, New Money: The Marketing of an American Artist," *New York Times Magazine* (February 10, 1985), accessible online at https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/08/09/specials/basquiat-mag.html?_r=2 (5/31/2018).

including cash advances and working space in her basement.⁵⁰ This arrangement provided Nosei with a singular opportunity to share with her collectors: watching the creation of future masterpieces in real time. Notably, these collectors included the same Reiners who would go on to purchase Schnabel's *Notre Dame* at auction. Anita Reiner visited Nosei's basement in 1981 and purchased the *Untitled* she saw in progress, a painting that her estate resold for \$34 million in 2016.⁵¹ While these studio visits provided the young Basquiat with a growing client base, they also formed a constant irritation, and he began to resent the racialized implications of wealthy white collectors coming to witness a performance of primitive wildness. Basquiat began to search for new representation—showing at the FUN gallery in the East Village alongside Julian Schnabel. He eventually made his way to Los Angeles, where he replicated his live/work situation with Larry Gagosian, whose basement became an artist's studio and party haunt. In Los Angeles, he developed a brief romantic relationship with Madonna and fell more deeply into the problems with drugs that would afflict him for the remainder of his tragically short life.⁵²

Through these ups and downs, Basquiat retained his affiliation with Bruno Bischofberger, who longed to find the artist a more stable gallery situation. It was ultimately Bischofberger who convinced Boone to take on Basquiat. Basquiat was initially thrilled with the elite status conferred through an affiliation with Boone—and by extension, with the grand master Castelli. In the wake of Schnabel's departure, Boone recalls that Basquiat was quick to comfort her and eager to rise into the position of the gallery's new featured star. Boone recalls Basquiat bursting into her office as soon as he heard the news, boldly declaring, "Don't worry, Mary, I'm going to make you much more rich and famous than Julian ever would," and then smashing a watermelon on her desk for dramatic effect.⁵³ Boone, who was conscious that Basquiat was "almost too hot" to take in to her stable, made a conscious effort to slow the growth the artist was experiencing. Boone waited until May of 1984 to give the artist his first solo show, and priced the

50. Anthony Haden-Guest, "Burning Out," *Vanity Fair* (November 1988), accessible online at <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/1988/11/jean-michel-basquiat> (5/31/2018).

51. Rain Embuscado, "Here Are Jean-Michel Basquiat's Most Expensive Works at Auction," *Artnet* (May 16, 2016), <https://news.artnet.com/market/jean-michel-basquiat-most-expensive-works-2016-496796> (5/31/2018).

52. Haden-Guest, "Burning Out." For more on the blue-chip art world embrace of graffiti art during this period, see Calvin Tomkins, "'Up from the I.R.T.,' Graffiti Art," *New Yorker* (March 26, 1984), 1022.

53. Fischl, "Mary Boone."

work at what she characterized as under market value, \$10,000–\$25,000. But the restless Basquiat was not to be held back. In 1986, after only two solo exhibitions, Basquiat severed his relationship with Mary Boone, claiming that she had attempted to usurp his place in the limelight and had done “nothing for my career.”⁵⁴ Two years later, he would die of a heroin overdose at age twenty-seven.

The experience with Schnabel—2,500 percent price growth in four years—had perhaps taught Boone the danger of letting price growth get out of hand. But market forces, once unleashed, can be difficult to control. During and immediately after their tenure together, Basquiat’s auction results hovered comfortably just above their retail prices—with ten of Basquiat’s work selling for between \$20,000 and \$30,000 between 1985 and 1987.⁵⁵ But soon, hammer prices began to skyrocket: a staggering \$90,000 for *Dos Cabezas* (1982) in February 1988, and then, following his death in August, results of \$95,000, \$85,000, and \$100,000 before the year was over. By the end of the decade, Basquiat’s work would cross the six-figure market at auction nearly twenty times, capped off by the astonishing sale of *Arroz Con Pollo* (1981) for \$400,000 in November of 1989. While Basquiat’s ascent into the firmament of mainstream celebrity and tragic death do position him as an outlier, his meteoric rise is nevertheless characteristic of the world built, brick by brick, by Boone. Her mainstays, such as David Salle and Eric Fischl, watched their auction stock ride a wave of explosive growth. Salle saw his high-water mark at auction shoot up from \$30,000 in 1985 to \$500,000 in 1989; Fischl enjoyed similar growth from \$26,000 in 1986 to \$650,000 in 1990. While this head-spinning ascent was in no small part due to Boone’s facility as an artist advocate and salesperson, the trajectory of her program was tied up in a changing financial landscape that extended far beyond the art world.

The Contemporary and the Future(s)

Indeed, it is often remarked that the eminently salable objects produced under the broad sweep of the “return to painting” seem to offer a kind of art-world manifestation of the rise of international finance capitalism over the course of the 1980s. On the one hand, an artist like Jeff Koons seems to crystallize this connection: a former stockbroker who turned a new page in

54. Haden-Guest, “Burning Out.”

55. All auction results from Artprice auction database.

the tradition of the Duchampian readymade by introducing a slick, contemporary retail idiom. While the depth of Jeff Koons's actual experience as a trader has recently come under question, his work seems to suggest a broad conceptual attunement between the buoyancy of the bull market and the rhythms of the art world.⁵⁶ Others have noted a striking set of crossovers between this art world and the new conservative political order taking shape on both sides of the Atlantic. Presaging our own moment, the advertising magnate Charles Saatchi used cutting-edge marketing techniques to deliver 10 Downing St. to Margaret Thatcher, whose promise of a return to traditional British values echoed with the atavism of the neo-Expressionist painting of which Saatchi became a key patron.⁵⁷

Previous commentary on this subject has alluded to, but not probed in depth, the ways in which the infrastructure developed around and through the international return to painting reprised contemporaneous conditions in the global stock market.⁵⁸ The degree to which this resonance is a consequence of direct influence on the part of elite purchasers remains an open question. However, whether this is an example of overt strategy or convergent evolution matters less than the central observation: that the painting-crazed art world of the 1980s became mimetic of the economic moment into which it was born.

The most straightforward example of this mimesis lies in Boone's adaptation of the waiting list. Indeed, Boone became famous for her endless lists; favored collectors were granted earlier and easier access to work; others were kept on the margins to grant the work an air of exclusivity that would justify its increasingly staggering price tag. But, like Castelli's decision to switch to a salaried rather than commission-based model, Boone made a minor tweak in the operation of her gallery that had far-reaching consequences. In Boone's system, collectors on the list would have a new option. Rather than simply waiting around hoping for a chance to scoop up a newly finished artwork, collectors could pay ahead of time for works that did not exist yet.⁵⁹

56. Greg Allen, "Jeff Koons, Commodities Broker," October 13, 2010, *greg.org*, <https://greg.org/archive/2010/10/13/jeff-koons-commodities-broker.html> (accessed 3/31/2020).

57. Hans Haacke, *Working Conditions: The Writings of Hans Haacke* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 110.

58. See for example Hal Foster, "Against Pluralism," *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1985), 14–15. See also Juli Carson and Michael Moshe Dahan, *Libidinal Economies: Art in the Age of Bull Markets* (Irvine: University of California, University Art Gallery, 2015).

59. Mason, "She Can't Be Bought." For additional context, see Tim Schneider, "The Dealer Will See You Now: Why Gallery Waiting Lists Are the Ultimate Art-Market Paradox," *Art-*

And as objects that only existed in the future, they held only a hypothetical value. Implicit in the arrangement was the tantalizing possibility that they could be worth more than had been paid for them. Potentially much more.

Through this change, Boone brought in a new financial instrument, a “futures contract,” into the world of the art market. Futures contracts have been standard features of market exchanges for centuries; they provide a needed hedge for certain kinds of economic activity with high degrees of uncertainty. A farmer might expect a bushel of grain to sell for \$25 after it was harvested, but rather than waiting through an unpredictable growing season, he could sell a futures contract on the same grain to a commodities trader for \$20. The trader could then make a profit reselling the grain to food producers, earning her cut by assuming the risk of rising or falling prices in place of the farmer. But while agricultural futures have served as an important lynchpin of the world’s economy (and food supply) since Babylonian times, the notion of a futures contract was essentially reinvented in the New York Stock Exchange in the early 1980s.⁶⁰ Whereas futures contracts had always been grounded in some deliverable—such as wheat grown and then harvested—traders created new futures markets around intangible goods that might never need to be delivered, the first and most important of which was foreign currency.

In the 1970s, the US experienced a period of economic stagnation due in part to shortages of key raw materials (most famously, the 1973 oil crisis). This stagnation was reflected and exacerbated by inflation of the US dollar—prices rose on everything as transportation fuel became more expensive. The economic doldrums of the 1970s, which must partly account for the shift to the nonprofit models discussed in the previous two chapters, had the more direct effect of finally breaking apart the Bretton Woods Agreement, a shared international monetary policy in Europe and East Asia set in the wake of World War II.⁶¹ The diminishing purchasing power of the US dollar put unprecedented pressure on the agreement for nations to adhere to a “pegged rate” in which currency could be exchanged between participating nations at a predictable conversion. These rates had been kept stable as national treasuries bought and sold reserves of each other’s currency. For

net (June 22, 2017), <https://news.artnet.com/market/book-excerpt-great-reframing-waiting-list-1001498> (10/13/2020).

60. Donald Mackenzie, *An Engine, Not a Camera: How Financial Models Shape Markets* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 146–48, 184. See also Joseph Vogl, *The Specter of Capital* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), 74.

61. Mackenzie, *An Engine, Not a Camera*, 146.

example, if the US was experiencing a period of inflation (declining purchasing power), other member nations would buy US dollars, thus driving their availability down and keeping their purchasing power up. While domestically, a strong dollar exacerbated the labor-market suffering created by the waning of the postwar recovery, Bretton Woods made the US vulnerable to extortion by foreign governments, who could easily threaten a run on American gold reserves.

By the 1970s, the financial rationale of the Bretton Woods was rapidly falling apart. President Nixon cut the last remaining connection between US dollars and gold bullion reserves. This detached fiat currency created a newfound need, and an opportunity, for a futures market in foreign money, one that quickly grew to incorporate a flurry of new financial derivatives. These new instruments expanded in both volume and complexity through the gradual introduction of computer-based trading over the course of the early 1980s.⁶² These new financial instruments and technologies drove unprecedented growth in the stock market as well as in the economy more broadly. The S&P 500 tripled in value between in 1982 and 1987, while one study suggested that between 1982 and 1989 the total net value of US assets increased by 50 percent, from \$10 to \$15 trillion.⁶³

Given the public attention these new financial products received, it was perhaps only a matter of time before someone as media-conscious as Mary Boone adapted a parallel strategic approach to the increasingly active market for contemporary art. Details about the origins of this idea remain murky; Boone's papers are closed to outside researchers pending her ongoing prison sentence. In an interview with the author, she insisted that there was little to distinguish her approach aside from her particularly aggressive use of pressure around waiting lists. Nevertheless, it seems that at some point during the middle 1980s, Boone adapted the practice of taking payment in advance for works not just to be delivered, but actually *created* in the future.⁶⁴ As she teased a reporter in a recent conversation, "How can you sell something that hasn't been created yet?"⁶⁵ Previous commentary on this issue has typically focused on pricing and waiting as a marketing tactic. A ratcheted-up wait

62. R. Stafford Johnson, *Debt Markets and Analysis* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 479–82.

63. <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/01/17/opinion/the-reagan-boom-greatest-ever.html>

64. Mason, "She Can't Be Bought"; Don Thompson, *The \$12 Million Stuffed Shark*, 195.

65. <https://www.townandcountrymag.com/society/money-and-power/a26932490/what-happened-to-mary-boone/>

list, in which collectors were obliged to pay for a spot in line, confirmed the pent-up demands of collectors for anything her stable had touched.

But in light of the contemporaneous innovation around futures markets on Wall Street, the Boone model of up-front payment for unspecified delivery takes on the quality of a financial instrument. Paintings to be created, but already owned, become a theoretical asset that can realize gains (or losses) as the uncertain future draws closer to arrival. But Boone's innovation on the selling side only explains half of the story. To understand how art futures were able to deliver on their promise—to realize actual increases in price between the signing of a contract and the delivery of a painting—we need to attend to the corollary shifts in the secondary market. These shifts also drew their inspiration from the techniques, and the unfolding battles, taking place in the global stock market.

MARGIN CALLS

The explosion of new wealth created by the introduction of financial derivatives opened up many new kinds of investment stratagems, including the acquisition of whole companies. The 1980s became famous for its “corporate raids” in which enormously wealthy investors would work to acquire shares in a target company in which they could exert new shareholder control, often to the apparent detriment of the company itself. Most famously, investor Carl Icahn executed a hostile takeover of TWA airlines—purchasing its debt in the form of stock, and then taking the company private to sell off its assets to repay himself.⁶⁶ Boone's dedicated patron Asher Edelman developed an international reputation as a ruthless raider; he taught a now-iconic course at Columbia Business School on the topic, popularizing the use of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* as a business text by assigning it as reading in the course.⁶⁷

While a number of iconic companies fell victim to corporate raids over the course of the 1980s, in the early part of the decade that fate seemed sure to befall the London-based Sotheby's auction house. Profit margins had

66. For an excellent overview of Icahn's takeover of TWA, see Robert Slater, *The Titans of Takeover* (Philadelphia: Beard Books, 1999), 69–90.

67. Linda Digusta, “The Occupation of Asher Edelman,” *Revolt Magazine*. Republished on Edelman's blog, <https://ashedelman.com/2012/07/13/revolt-magazine-the-occupations-of-asher-edelman/> (accessed 3/31/2020).

been dwindling over the course of the 1970s until 1982, when the firm went into the red for an entire fiscal year for the first time in decades. Its diminishing financial health made it vulnerable to corporate raiders, and a pair of American investors, Marshall Cogan and Stephen Swid, sought to buy up a majority stake in the company. The board of the auction did not take kindly to the takeover attempt by an American rug-manufacture conglomerate; Cogan and Swid's bid would have effectively made Sotheby's into a subsidiary of their General Felt Industries.⁶⁸

In March of 1983—one month before the precedent-shattering Schnabel sale—Sotheby's called an emergency board meeting and endeavored to find a way to stave off the takeover bid launched by Cogan and Swid. The simplest thing, of course, would be for the firm to find another buyer, one whose intentions the board had more confidence in. They found their so-called “white knight” investor in the American collector and consumer-goods executive A. Alfred Taubman. A self-made tycoon, Taubman had been forced to borrow \$5,000 to open his first retail venture. What began with a single outlet soon grew into a commercial network: by the end of the 1970s Taubman was managing an empire that included nearly two dozen luxury shopping malls, the A&W Restaurants chain, and a football team in the now-defunct United States Football League.⁶⁹ He became prolific collector of modern art and a generous museum supporter. Strikingly, Taubman had been a patron of Castelli's in the early 1960s, and his funds were instrumental for the Whitney to put together the \$1 million it had paid to Burton and Emily Tremaine for Johns's *Three Flags* in 1980.⁷⁰ Having witnessed firsthand the untapped potential of the secondary market for postwar art, he must have followed with enthusiasm the unfolding of the Schnabel sale in the pages of the *Washington Post*. With two decades of retail experience and comparatively intimate familiarity with the blue-chip art world, Taubman seemed an ideal steward to bring Sotheby's back to financial health.

68. R. W. Apple, Jr., “Sotheby's Board Decides to Resist Takeover Bid,” *New York Times* (March 12, 1983), <https://www.nytimes.com/1983/03/12/arts/sotheby-s-board-decides-to-resist-takeover-bid.html> (5/31/2018).

69. Robert D. McFadden, “A. Alfred Taubman, 91, Dies; Developer, Sotheby's Owner and Focus of Scandal,” *New York Times* (April 20, 2015), D8, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/19/business/a-alfred-taubman-shopping-mall-tycoon-involved-in-price-fixing-scandal-dies-at-91.html> (5/31/2018).

70. Taubman Correspondence, Leo Castelli Gallery Files, Archives of American Art. See also Taubman Oral History Interview, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-alfred-taubman-21662#transcript> (accessed 3/31/2020). For *Three Flags*, see Graham Thompson, *American Culture in the 1980s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 67.

One of the first major changes Taubman made was a thoroughgoing attempt to make auctions more inviting to uninitiated, retail customers. Prior to his takeover, auctions had been genteel events run by and for insiders. Most existing accounts focus on the marketing aspect of these changes, emphasizing his oft-repeated quip that “selling art has much in common with selling root beer.”⁷¹ However, Taubman’s customer-facing presentation was only part of a broader shift in Sotheby’s business model, the repercussions of which are still reverberating through the art market. At the most basic level, Taubman sought to open the auctions to the public, and not just because he wanted more customers; more importantly, he strove to capture the margin that belonged to the dealers, who bought low at auction with the intent to resell high to their private retail clients. As he explained to an interviewer in 2013, “Sotheby’s and Christie’s were wholesalers basically for dealers. That’s what they really were. And I wanted them to become direct sales to customers, to the ultimate owners.”⁷² This paradigm was set by the Schnabel sale, in which the high-margin, direct-to-collector transaction occurred on the auction floor directly.

In service of this goal, Taubman pushed through a number of changes on the financial side of its business. Much has been made of Sotheby’s pioneering use of “guarantees,” and though the period of innovation postdates the historical focus of this chapter, this discussion would be incomplete without briefly covering this topic. Historically, if an object failed to meet a prearranged minimum threshold when put up for auction, the work would be “bought in”—simply returned to the consigner as a failed sale. Although critical accounts differ, at some point in the lead-up to the Taubman’s tenure, Sotheby’s began to offer what were euphemistically termed “special arrangements”—agreements with the seller such that if a minimum bid failed to emerge, the auction house itself would purchase the work directly at the agreed-on price. This tactic removed an enormous portion of the risk to potential sellers, and had the effect of increasing the number of pictures available for auction.⁷³ These arrangements began to grow more “special” with time. Taubman’s career was marred by a major scandal involving collu-

71. McFadden, “A. Alfred Taubman, 91, Dies.”

72. Taubman Oral History Interview.

73. See also Tom Flynn, *The A–Z of the International Art Market: The Essential Guide to Customs, Conventions and Practice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 76. See also Shireen Huda, *Pedigree and Panache: A History of the Art Auction in Australia* (Canberra: Australia National University Press, 2008), 29. For a good overview of these auction instruments see Anna Brouwer, “Auction Guarantees in the Contemporary Art Market,” MA thesis, 2015, University of Zurich.

sion with Christie's around the preferable rates paid for guaranteed pictures, the Sotheby's CEO being sentenced to prison for price-fixing.⁷⁴ Scandal continues to cloud the practice, especially around the more recent advent of "irrevocable bids"—guarantees offered by third parties. Because they involved a cash payment in the case that works sold above the guarantee, these arrangements opened the door to mischief. Dealers, for example, may rush to guarantee works and then encourage their clients to bid at open auction. Nevertheless, their popularity continues to grow, with guaranteed works now buttressing billions of dollars of transactions every year.⁷⁵

More germane to the present discussion, however, was Taubman's introduction of a financial instrument with roots in the worlds of both luxury retail and speculative finance. In 1984, shortly after he rescued the firm, Sotheby's began extending credit to prospective auction buyers.⁷⁶ Such loans, which parallel the structure of both shopping-mall "layaway" and Wall Street "margin debt," were often made on terms strikingly advantageous to the auction house. Sotheby's would commonly extend loans for specific auction lots, covering 50 percent of whatever final price a work of art achieved at interests rates as high as 4 percent over prime.⁷⁷ As the critic Robert Hughes noted in 1989, these loans had "inflate[d] prices whether the borrower wins the painting or not: like a gambler with chips on house credit, he will bid it up." If a customer with a Sotheby's line of credit won at auction, Sotheby's could expect additional revenue through the interest on the loans that financed the winning bid. However, if the highest bid came from elsewhere, that final bid would certainly have been higher because of the competing offers coming from those who were, in Hughes's terms, gambling with house chips. Even the risk scenario in most loans situations—that of debtor default—worked

74. For an authoritative account of this episode, see chapter 7 of Christopher Mason, *The Art of the Steal* (New York: Penguin, 2005). In a final twist of irony, Taubman's estate was able to secure a \$500 million guarantee from Sotheby's for the disposal of his collection after his death, a guarantee that created a \$12 million operating loss for the company as a whole. Guelda Voien, "Sotheby's Reports \$12M Loss in Q4, Following Risky Taubman Guarantee," *Observer* (January 22, 2016), accessible online at <https://observer.com/2016/01/sothebys-reports-12m-loss-in-q4-following-risky-taubman-guarantee/> (accessed 3/31/2020).

75. Anna Brady, "Guarantees: The Next Big Art Market Scandal?" *Art Newspaper* (November 12, 2018), <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/guarantees-the-next-big-art-market-scandal> (accessed 3/31/2020).

76. Robert Hughes, "Sold! It Went Crazy, It Stays Crazy, but Don't Ask What the Art Market Is Doing to Museums and the Public," *TIME* (November 27, 1989), <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,959134,00.html> (accessed 3/31/2020).

77. Hughes, "Sold!"

counterintuitively to Sotheby's benefit here. If a collector purchased a work at auction and then became unable to repay the loan, Sotheby's would simply repossess the painting, keep the partial payments, and turn around to resell the work with a newly achieved price benchmark.

Credit proved to be a fertile source of innovation. Because Taubman's takeover had involved delisting the company from public exchanges, Sotheby's was no longer required to disclose its debt positions, and as such was free to move into uncharted financial waters. The auction house began, in the words of the *New York Times*, to "aggressively pursue new business" in the lending of credit to prospective object *sellers*, sometimes even a decade in advance of a planned sale.⁷⁸ Taubman began to offer Sotheby's credit as a source of working capital to dealers, even when no work might be planned for auction, insisting that those in the trade could begin to "make their collections work for them."⁷⁹ While it is tempting to speculate how the availability of such loans might have tempered Castell's need to secure working capital from Scull, the more tantalizing vision offered by this financialization lays in the shimmering future of the auction house. As a combined credit source and clearinghouse, Taubman hoped Sotheby's could attain a kind of perpetual motion of commerce: becoming, in his words, "a retail business without inventory."⁸⁰

These financial instruments began to work wonders for the auction house's recovery. By the end of the decade, revenue generated by interest from customer lending and other related investment services was generating more 10 percent of Sotheby's gross revenue: \$240 million of a now multibillion-dollar international auction empire.⁸¹ During this same window, revenue generated by auction in contemporary art, which had been essentially nonexistent before Taubman's tenure, increased by an order of magnitude: from \$10 million in the first year of his ownership to over \$100 million in 1988.⁸² This incredible growth was felt through both the primary and secondary markets, with many observers noting that as benefits accrued on both sides, the line between the two was becoming increasingly blurry. The press and market interest generated by Boone's stable was salutary to

78. Marilyn Bender, "High Finance Makes a Bid for Art," *New York Times* (February 3, 1985), sec. 3, p. 1.

79. Bender, "High Finance." Attributed source is Diana D. Brooks, executive vice president of Sotheby's North America.

80. Bender, "High Finance."

81. Hughes, "SOLD!"

82. Staff, "There's One Born Every Minute," *The Economist* (May 27, 1989), 7.

Sotheby's—a six-year-old Basquiat painting, for example, topped \$300,000 at auction in 1988—and these stunning results only helped to bolster Boone's earnings, which topped \$22 million during that same year.⁸³

However, Sotheby's newly energized business was also driving and reflecting changes in the art market beyond the contemporary. Indeed, these changes had little to do with art history, or even art itself, but were instead the product of shifting terrain in the international financial landscape. Such shifts were increasingly making art into something it had never really been: an asset class useful for institutional investors. As the *Economist* noted in 1989, “a new breed of buyer is appearing: plain speculators who buy, wait for prices to jump, then sell.”⁸⁴ Sometimes, these speculators would forgo the formality of picking up their new, multimillion-dollar acquisitions, leaving them with the auction house until they could profitably be resold. Some of the highest-profile institutional speculators came from overseas, in particular East Asia. Exemplified by the sale of Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* for just under \$40 million in 1987 to the giant Yasuda Fire and Marine Insurance Company, Japanese business alone accounted for a steadily increasing share of Sotheby's revenue.⁸⁵ This rapidly expanding business frontier grew not only out of cultural interest in Post-Impressionist European painting but also the state of the international financial landscape. For Japanese investors, the acquisition of top-shelf European painting—with as much as half easily paid for on margin debt from the auction house itself—made increasing financial sense.

This deluge of overseas money had the effect of increasing fervor in an already overheated contemporary art market. In November 1986, a Jasper Johns painting, *Out the Window*, was auctioned by Sotheby's for \$3.6 million, a striking figure that would not have risen above the noise of the rest of the tumbling auction records were it not for a coincidental sale of a da Vinci drawing for the same amount during the same week. But perhaps the best encapsulation of the new ferment was offered by investor and noted Boone patron Asher Edelman. In 1987, Edelman explained the changes in the art market he was witnessing to *New York Magazine* thusly: “The auction is a hog pen environment. . . . I think its wonderful. It creates a great form of

83. Staff, “There's One Born Every Minute.”

84. Staff, “There's One Born Every Minute.”

85. Graham Heathcote, “Reveal van Gogh's *Sunflowers* Bought by Japanese Firm,” *Associated Press* (April 8, 1987), <https://www.apnews.com/1e5fc4f4e7c9cf3159a89b5c9da6a03f> (accessed 5/31/18).

patronage. So I welcome the hogs to the hog pens.”⁸⁶ While this oft-repeated comment is typically read as kind of perverse celebration of the newly differentiated marketplace, Edelman clearly had something more specific in mind. Having spent an important part of his career trading futures, he was doubtless in part referring to the paradigmatic futures in pork bellies, which were widely traded in the early 1980s as a hedge against consumer food inflation. As Edelman observed, it was not so much that the trade in artworks had taken on the qualities of a livestock auction, but that it had come to beat out the rhythms of a financial futures market.

ENGENDERING DIFFERENCE

But Edelman’s oft-repeated quip was actually a later iteration of a comparison he made repeatedly to the press, the first recorded instance of which takes on a notably different inflection. In 1986, the investor bemoaned the state of the art auction to *New York Magazine*, explaining that “I don’t like going anymore, because it’s like a hog pit. It’s the place to exhibit your manliness in its fullest fashion.”⁸⁷ Indeed, Edelman was far from alone in linking the bravado of the auction and art world to the machismo of Wall Street finance. The optics of this dynamic—male bravura painters attempting to outduel each other with the biggest canvases and most expensive works sold to the highest-flying investors—weighed heavily against the critical reception of Boone’s stable. When interviewing Boone in 2014, Eric Fischl recounted how “Julian comes along—he’s an alpha dog. He totally represents the most larger-than-life example of male ego, male power. . . . we were all lumped together, especially because we were working in this supposedly dead medium: the death of the male, the death of painting.”⁸⁸ Indeed, neo-Expressionist painting—as reification of both male artistic ego and the high-testosterone world of Wall Street trading—has since become an art-historical bad object for its alignment with an atavistic capitalist patriarchy.

However, this easy mapping of gendered and economic dynamics falls apart under closer examination. While Boone herself denied that her stable

86. Dinitia Smith, “Art Fever: The Passion and Frenzy of the Ultimate Rich Man’s Sport,” *New York Magazine* (April 20, 1987), 39.

87. Douglas C. McGill, “New Breed of High-Stakes Buyer Pushes Art-Auction Prices to Limit,” *New York Times* (November 24, 1986), <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/11/24/arts/new-breed-of-high-stakes-buyer-pushes-art-auction-prices-to-limit.html> (accessed 5/31/2018).

88. Fischl, “Mary Boone.”

had an identity politics—“it never occurred to me to show Jean-Michel because he was black or to show Barbara and Sherrie because they were women”—Fischl insists that his critical reception as “the feminized male, the sensitive one” had entailed a reversal of the expected gender polarity. This was a position Boone herself maintained during the 1980s, explaining in an interview in 1982, “it’s the men now who are emotional and intuitive,” an observation that reinforced her own position as the business-oriented gallery director at the center of a cohort of male artists mining their unmediated passions.⁸⁹

Seen in this light, Boone’s ascendance as a gallery director mirrors broader transformations taking place in the white-collar workplace, particularly the contemporaneous rise of women on Wall Street. These women, most of whom were born during the tail end of postwar Baby Boom, had come of age watching the feminist movements of the late 1960s and 1970s, and held radically different ideas about their career trajectories than their predecessors. As Margo Epprecht, a hedge-fund director who joined the finance industry in the early 1980s, explained in a recent op-ed in the *Atlantic*, “[we were] educated as equals with our male peers, and we were lucky enough to have pioneers ahead of us to hire us and confirm our confidence.”⁹⁰ Indeed, as firms staffed up to make the most of the growing bull market, women began to enter investment firms in unprecedented numbers.⁹¹

Moreover, Boone’s reticence to be identified with an explicitly feminist agenda maps onto the prevailing attitudes of women navigating the white-collar workplace more broadly. This dynamic was particularly visible in the internal debates in the Financial Women’s Association, which during the early 1980s resisted calls from its members to provide explicit support to the Equal Rights Amendment, or even more controversially, access to abortions. The leadership insisted that the cause of women was best served not by taking up what it deemed to be “political” causes, but rather by serving as a networking and support organization for women in the narrowly

89. Corinne Robbins, “Ten Months of Rush Hour Figuration,” *Arts* 57, no. 1 (September 1982): 101. See also Howard Singerman, *Art History, After Sherrie Levine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 171.

90. Margo Epprecht, “The Real Reason Why Women Are Leaving Wall Street,” *The Atlantic* (September 2013), <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/09/the-real-reason-why-women-are-leaving-wall-street/279379/> (accessed 5/31/2018).

91. Melissa S. Fisher, *Wall Street Women* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), particularly 66–94.

constructed finance industry.⁹² Boone's contemporaneous positioning of her gallery reflected a similar resistance to the goals of "political" feminism.

During the same interview in which she made the observation about the new emotional intuitiveness of male painters, Boone insisted that her gallery would continue excluding women from representation. "Big deal art marketing has neither time nor space for women artists . . . museums just don't buy paintings by women."⁹³ While this comment in particular occasioned considerable pushback, Boone continued to resist calls to expand the gender diversity of her program. As she explained to Andy Grundberg of the *New York Times* four years later, "if women allow themselves to make excuses for their regrets . . . then the women's movement becomes nothing but an excuse for mediocrity."⁹⁴ Echoing a common refrain from female pioneers in the finance sector, Boone insisted that concessions for the sake of diversity had the potential to undermine the hard-won victories of those who had entered male-dominated spheres without any such assistance.

But if Boone resisted showing women artists for the sake of diversity, she nevertheless came to provide pivotal support to Barbara Kruger and Sherrie Levine, two of the most highly regarded critical-feminist artists of the decade. This appeared to be a strange alliance for both artists and dealer; as art historian Howard Singerman put it, "Kruger and Levine were not just women artists, but artists whose critical appraisal had insisted on—and depended on—their oppositionality."⁹⁵ Indeed, Kruger and Levine had built their reputations in the alternative, largely nonprofit-driven art world, developing practices premised on tactics such as pastiche and appropriation. These artists, affiliated with the loose-knit "Pictures Generation," aimed to subvert the heroic genius-artist construction on which Boone's brand identity—and revenue—were entirely dependent. Indeed, Barbara Kruger's iconic *You Invest in the Divinity of the Masterpiece* (1987), a tightly cropped photograph of the Creation scene in Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling overlaid with the title text, overtly satirizes the art-as-investment paradigm on which Boone's business model was predicated.

And while contemporary critics were quick to judge Kruger and Levine harshly for their supposed betrayal, few of these critics were willing to grant that that the move to Boone represented not just opportunity, but also strat-

92. Fisher, *Wall Street Women*, 55–59.

93. Robbins, "Ten Months of Rush Hour Figuration," 101.

94. Quoted in Singerman, *Art History After Sherrie Levine*, 171.

95. Singerman, *Art History After Sherrie Levine*, 171.

egy, on the part of these artists. As art historian Jo Anna Isaak has since argued, the hyper-commercialism associated with Boone's gallery provided the ideal launching pad for Kruger; a work such as *You Invest* drew much of its satirical power from its installation at Mary Boone Gallery in 1987.⁹⁶ Similarly, Sherrie Levine was quick to tell interviewers that the move to Boone was actually aligned with her artistic objectives. While admitting to *Flash Art's* Paul Taylor that she had moved to Boone "for all the obvious reasons," Levine maintained that, beyond the advantages that affiliation with an elite program would bring, Boone's alignment with the revival of Expressionist painting made her gallery the ideal home. Indeed, Levine had been occupied for several years with direct repaintings of works by post-Impressionist masters such as Egon Schiele, a gesture of quotation that stood in marked juxtaposition to the generalized (and, by implication, un-self-aware) citation of Expressionist tropes by Boone's masculinist painters.⁹⁷

Despite similar beginnings, Levine and Kruger would experience different kinds of trajectories at Boone's gallery. Both opened with retrospective survey exhibitions in 1987, with the thoroughgoing commercialism of the gallery lingering as an explicit frame of commentary. While Kruger's bold, text-based proclamations actively foregrounded an ethos of critique, Levine's commentary was comparatively oblique, with her appropriation of check-board motifs sliding into a subtle reference to "checks" at Boone.⁹⁸ Both would have followup exhibitions in 1989 and 1991 that grew progressively more ambitious. Levine mounted a translation of Duchamp's iconic *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even . . .* (1915–1923), casting each of the Bachelor characters in frosted glass and mounting them within luxuriously fabricated vitrines.⁹⁹ Kruger's followup entailed turning the entire gallery space into an immersive installation where her signature juxtapositions of high-contrast photographs, red rectilinear elements, and white text submerge the viewer in a kind of graphic cacophony. But while Kruger would continue to show with Boone in future decades, only abandoning the gallery

96. Jo Anna Isaak, *Feminism and Contemporary Art: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 44.

97. Paul Taylor, "Sherrie Levine," *Flash Art* (July–September 1987): 59.

98. Taylor, "Sherrie Levine." See also Roberta Smith, "From Sherrie Levine, a Mini-Retrospective," *New York Times* (September 18, 1987). Most easily accessible from *New York Times* online archive.

99. Roberta Smith, "Sherrie Levine Enters the World of Sculpture," *New York Times* (September 8, 1989). Most easily accessible from *New York Times* online archive.

when Boone was sentenced to prison in 2019, Levine split off from Boone in the early 1990s, showing only once with her former dealer, in 2010.¹⁰⁰

But attention to expensively manufactured installations, and differing personal relationships, risks obfuscating the most salient historical point concerning the interplay between these three figures during the 1980s. Namely, the complex tissue of relationships between art practice and the art market is far from unidirectional or determinative. The massive growth of the market for contemporary art did not land in an otherwise passive world of practicing artists; these changes in market condition became the impetus, and even the ground, out of which artists could make work. Indeed, we may think of Kruger and Levine's works as counterpoint examples to Johns's beer cans, artifacts that both thematized and satirized the pioneering commercialism of their dealers' operations. In this way, Levine's overwrought Expressionist revivals and Kruger's citation of the "Invest[ing] . . . in the Masterpiece" function as ironic monuments to the alignment between Boone and the bull market, which both investors and patrons seemed to assume would go on indefinitely.

THE CRASH AND AFTER

The first of these assumptions came to a jarring halt on Monday, October 19, 1987. In what has since become known as "Black Monday," the stock market endured its worst day in history, including the free-fall of the Great Depression, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average losing 22.6 percent of its value. The destruction on Wall Street was unprecedented: losses mounted to over \$1 trillion over a single day of trading, and over 15,000 workers in the financial sector lost their jobs.¹⁰¹ Economists and historians have since pointed to several interrelated causes for the 1987 crash. The event that set the catastrophe in motion was probably the Louvre Accord, reached eight months before the crash, which attempted to create a new set of stabilized exchange rates, rates that put pressure on the American

100. Wallace Ludel, "David Zwirner now represents former Mary Boone Gallery artist Barbara Kruger," *Artsy* (November 22, 2019), <https://www.artsy.net/news/artsy-editorial-david-zwirner-represents-mary-boone-gallery-artist-barbara-kruger> (accessed 10/12/2020).

101. Paul Farhi, "Black Monday: Did It Matter?" *Washington Post* (October 16, 1988), https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/business/1988/10/16/black-monday-did-it-matter/cc0e7209-745d-46b6-9bd5-e3c54c91ea9a/?utm_term=.95c7bd904b7a (accessed 5/31/2018).

treasury to prop up the dollar with higher interest rates than the market could truly bear.¹⁰²

But once the losses started, the innovations of the 1980s stock market exacerbated the damage. While computerized trading programs reacted automatically to spiraling market conditions—a feed-forward mechanism that multiplied human panic—other structural changes in the market caused the damage to spread in unpredictable ways. Among the most important of these changes was the rise of so-called “portfolio insurance.” Created as a novel hedging strategy by a pair of Berkeley-based economists in the early 1980s, portfolio insurance functioned by setting preprogrammed thresholds at which investors would begin to sell stock-market index futures.¹⁰³ This strategy formed an extremely effective hedge against potential downturns, and it became almost ubiquitous among institutional investors over the course of the decade. But when a big downturn arrived, this hedging strategy turned into an enormous liability; massive institutional investors began selling in coordinated lockstep, with fewer and fewer big buyers left to serve as the counterparty to these programmatic sales.

And while the spiraling declines of late 1987 certainly changed the economic outlook of New York’s top income earners, the sudden stock-market crash had little immediate impact on the art market. In its December issue, *Art and Auction* was cautiously optimistic, noting that just nine days after the crash, an important post-Impressionist lot had achieved double its estimate.¹⁰⁴ Following that benchmark, Sotheby’s made headlines in November 1987 with another record-breaking sale: van Gogh’s *Irises* sold to Australian businessman Alan Bond for \$53.9 million, a record that stood for two years as the highest price paid for a single work of art. Even in the wake of the market downturn, Sotheby’s felt confident enough in their business model to extend their customary 50 percent loan.

This sense of relief with bated breath continued to dominate the collective consciousness of the art world for the next several months. As Joseph Helman, director of the Blum Helman Gallery, related to *Art News* in February 1988, “The amazing thing is that the stock market seems to have had so little effect.”¹⁰⁵ This sentiment was in fact largely borne out by unfold-

102. William A. Niskanen, “A Lower Dollar vs. Recession,” *New York Times* (October 27, 1987), A35.

103. For an excellent and accessible discussion of portfolio insurance, see Diana Henriques, *A First-Class Catastrophe* (New York: Henry Holt, 2017), 100–120.

104. Tommy Carraway, “Publishers Note: On Spec,” *Art and Auction* (December 1987): 16.

105. Richard W. Walker, “After the Crash: So Far, So Good,” *Art News* 87 (February 1988): 23.

ing market results—in early May 1988, Sotheby's broke the million-dollar threshold twice for contemporary work: Andy Warhol's *210 Coca Cola Bottles* sold for \$1.43 million while Richard Diebenkorn's *July* achieved \$1.55 million. The following day, rival Christie's auctioned Jasper Johns's *Diver* for an astonishing \$4.18 million.¹⁰⁶ These results encouraged art-market experts to extol the power of “flight capital”—money that had been pulled from the evidently unpredictable stock market into the ostensibly safe haven of blue-chip artworks.¹⁰⁷ By 1989, hardly anyone seemed concerned that the stock market downturn would inflict consequential damage on art prices.

But by the turn of the decade, the economic storm finally hit. Between 1989 and 1990, prices achieved by American painting at auction fell 21 percent, and the following year, Impressionist works suffered a 51 percent decline.¹⁰⁸ These tumbling prices were caused at least in part by the withdrawal of Japanese yen. Investigative reporting in Japan had revealed that much of the frenzied buying of Western art in the 1980s had served, as the *New York Times* put it, as “a front for massive corporate fraud and tax avoidance,” and predictably, high-dollar purchases ceased almost overnight. All told, the damage to the auction market was catastrophic: according to one study, the total volume of worldwide art auction revenue declined by an astonishing 90 percent from 1989 to 1991.¹⁰⁹ Predictably, this secondary-market carnage bore out a prediction made by dealer Richard Feigen shortly after the crash: because “there is a much closer linkage in the contemporary field to the financial markets . . . the contemporary market is much more vulnerable.”¹¹⁰ Indeed, by 1993, the damage had become so visible that it became the subject for art itself. In January of that year, the *New York Times* highlighted the work of Conceptual artist Lois Nesbit, who had been conducting a stickering campaign on defunct gallery spaces in lower Manhattan. According to Nesbit, at least seventy galleries had been forced to close between 1990 and 1992.

And as the leading contemporary dealer in the city, Boone's program was hit especially hard. As Eric Fischl recalled in 2014, “When the art market

106. Reviews, *Art and Auction* (September 1988), 157.

107. See for example B. C. Gardner, “On Fear,” *Art and Auction* (November 1988): 128.

108. Gianfranco Mossetto and Marilena Vecco, eds., *Economics of Art Auctions* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2002), 88.

109. Felix Salmon, “Art Market Chart of the Day, Auction Gross Edition,” *Reuters* (December 16, 2013), blogs.reuters.com/felix-salmon/2013/12/16/art-market-chart-of-the-day-auction-gross-edition/ (accessed 5/31/2018).

110. Sally Damon Turner, “The Market Report: After the Fall,” *Art and Auction* (December 1988): 125.

crashed, and my prices, which had been at an all-time high for me, almost overnight were cut in half and then in half again.”¹¹¹ But Boone’s gallery sustained damage beyond its bottom line; as the perceived impetus for the high-octane market of the 1980s, Boone was “vilified” for “turning [her artists] into commodities with stratospheric prices and waiting lists for their work.”¹¹² For her part, the dealer faulted the inevitable cycle of taste for the poor fortunes of her 1980s stable in the next decade. As she explained to the *New York Times*, “Pop art had a difficult time in the early 1970s; minimalism was questioned in the early 1980s. It’s no different for artists like Schnabel, [David] Salle, Fischl and [Ross] Bleckner.”¹¹³ For Boone, it was simply the bad luck of the artists in her program to have the winds shift in coincidence with a nosedive in the broader financial market.

There is some truth to Boone’s assertion, but the intervening decades have not been kind to the reputation of neo-Expressionist painting. With the exception of Basquiat (and a select number of the German painters associated with *Neue Wilden*), the work that passed through Boone’s gallery in the 1980s remains an object of art-historical derision. As Raphael Rubenstein put it, “after enjoying an initial burst of acclaim in the early 1980s, neo-Expressionism has fared very badly indeed, perhaps worse than any other major 20th-century art movement.”¹¹⁴ Indeed, the languishing reputation, and the disintegrated market value, of Fischl et al. offers stark lessons about the imbrication of intellectual and market value. Unlike Castelli, who dedicated painstaking efforts to ensuring that the work of his artists gathered the necessary stamps of art-historical and curatorial approval, Boone rode a wave of overnight celebrity. The irony is piquant, given the democratizing impulses of Pop and the elite positioning of 1980s painting. However, trouble emerged for Boone once fashions shifted and markets cooled. There hadn’t been time to build an intellectual or institutional backstop capable of supporting the work into the long term of history.

This counterpoise was thrown into sharp relief by a comment made by the artist Joseph Kosuth in *New York Magazine*’s 1982 profile of Boone. Reflecting on the changes wrought by Boone’s predecessor Leo Castelli, Kosuth

111. Fischl, “Mary Boone.”

112. Belcove, “A New Boone.”

113. Peter C. T. Elsworth, “All About/Art Sales; The Market’s Blue Period,” *New York Times* (May 10, 1992): sec. 3, p. 10.

114. Raphael Rubenstein, “Neo-Expressionism Not Remembered,” *Art in America* (January 2013), <https://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazines/neo-expressionism-not-remembered/> (accessed 5/31/2018).

argued that what had given way was the meaning derived from belonging to a unified field of art history. Whereas before, artists could work within or against an ostensibly singular tradition tracing itself back to the Old Masters, dealers had since forged a new terrain in which “the market would provide the meaning.”¹¹⁵ If Castelli’s feat had been to engineer rising prices for young American artists, Boone advanced this paradigm significantly. She orchestrated astonishing increases in the valuation of the artists under her direction as evidence of their suddenly undeniable historical importance. To her detractors, this was an ignoble achievement; she allowed the logic of the art market to seize control over the development of art history. But as Boone’s rapid demise came to illustrate, Kosuth’s observation captures only a part of the story. Rather than standing as a space apart in which practice can sort itself into history, the market is but one of an interrelated suite of value-creating ecosystems. It is a means of support that will disintegrate without an architecture through which to link the interest of financial stakeholders to those of cultural and historical institutions. Indeed, as the preceding pages have argued, it is the shape of this architecture that has conditioned the possibilities of creation, reception, and preservation. This is the dynamic of art history writing itself in the present tense, an omni-sided argument over historical worth made by countless, conflicting appeals to culture, to history, and to money.

115. Haden-Guest, “The New Queen of the Art Scene,” 26.

Postscript

Theaster Gates Builds Community

There is no disciplinary approximation of postcoloniality
that is not also an approximation of market logic.

—JAIME HANNEKEN, 2015

Near the completion of the writing of these pages, the catastrophic seriousness of the coronavirus pandemic began its global emergence. Tens of millions of cases, over a million deaths, and untold trillions in economic damage will alter the trajectory of nearly every imaginable human activity for decades to come. The art world and the art market comprise only a small corner of a world now careening into the unknown, but the changes set loose by COVID-19 (and by the attendant, renewed attention to the plague of systemic racism) will surely be extraordinarily deep. Among primary dealers, sales were down more than 30 percent in the first half of 2020, while digital transactions, formerly negligible as a fraction of overall revenue, jumped to near 40 percent of all purchases. Auction houses told a similar story. While a decline in market confidence creates a more mixed effect—consignors withhold lots, with supply contraction propping up the prices of pieces that do sell—the outlines are remarkably similar: drastic cuts to revenue, with disaster averted only by a rapid embrace of online transactions and erstwhile experiences.¹ As history unfolds in real time, changes in the

1. Dr. Clare McAndrew, “The Impact of COVID-19 on the Gallery Sector: A 2020 Mid-Year Survey,” research survey report commissioned by Art Basel & UBS, 317.



Theaster Gates, *Art Bond* (2013). (© Theaster Gates. Image courtesy Gagolian Gallery.)

institutional infrastructure are becoming visible; there is major consolidation of primary dealers, and cash infusions from outside stakeholders are needed to provide a lifeline of unknowable length to the fairs who depend on foot traffic for their very existence.² The futures of graduate education, art criticism, and museum culture hang only one step farther back from the cliff of unknowability. It will be the work of subsequent thinkers to examine this welter of changes with the benefit of analytic hindsight—to dive into depth here would be to confuse the roles of the historian and the journalist. Nor is this time and place to lodge speculation about the art historiographic fate of the NFT, a topic on which I have addressed in a more appropriate venue.³

2. See for example Tim Schneider, “Why Going into Business with James Murdoch Should Be a No-Brainer for Art Basel and the MCH Group,” *Artnet* (July 13, 2020), <https://news.artnet.com/opinion/james-murdoch-mch-group-gray-market-1894030> (accessed 10/30/2020); Tim Schneider, “Why Gavin Brown’s Move to Gladstone Suggests New York Galleries Are Worse Off Than We Thought,” *Artnet* (July 27, 2020), <https://news.artnet.com/opinion/gavin-brown-gladstone-gray-market-1897239> (accessed 10/30/2020).

3. Michael Maizels, “NFTs and the Future History of Art,” *Tech Crunch* (November 12, 2021), <https://techcrunch.com/2021/11/01/nfts-and-the-future-history-of-art/> (accessed 12/7/2021)

Rather, here at the end of this account, I would prefer to acknowledge my implicit models in order to turn to a near-term historical case study that both recapitulates and reconsiders the argument of the preceding pages. While my work has been informed and inspired by a number of scholars, the structure of this book is particularly indebted to Richard Meyer's *What Was Contemporary Art?* (2013), a masterful analysis of the many different paradigms that have structured the sense of being "contemporaneous" with art practice. The book focuses particularly on the role of the museum as a mediator between the timelessness of the past and the plastic canonicity of the present, examining in depth the opening of curatorial efforts focused on the art of the moment in the early and middle 20th century. As Meyer contends, this now-ness was always constructed in nonneutral ways by institutional rhetoric and relationships, whether the adventurous futurism of the Wellesley College collections, the cultural appropriation of modernist-primitivism at MoMA, or the failed populism of the early ICA–Boston. These episodes of interplay between institutional constellations and creative possibilities provided a model for my work, one to which I have endeavored to add the color of economic considerations. Meyer's book also influenced my career in more concrete ways. I proudly cited his research on Alfred Barr's time at Wellesley during my own postdoctoral interview at that institution, and strongly believe that it was recourse to his arguments that landed me the job.

But if Meyer's book was a part of my entrée into the academy, the present book was an inextricable part of my exit. My discovery of the Scull-Castelli tax fraud mechanism entailed a profound moment of both personal and professional disorientation. At a very early moment during my graduate training, I studied with a renowned Jasper Johns scholar who impressed on me that Johns's importance was attested to (if not overtly caused by) the way in which his work moved into MoMA's collections at an unprecedentedly early moment in his career. The dawning realization that these acquisitions were in fact only a spandrel, an after-effect of a much larger set of strategic movements that had little to do with art, entailed a crisis of consciousness. I resolved that I could no longer dedicate my career to the study of past art on its own terms. I left my academic position and—to better grapple with the future of this terrain—completed an MBA during the final stages of research for this book. I hope that *Collecting the Now* will function as field guide for thinking about the next stage of contested intersections between resources, institutions, and creative practice. The post-COVID commercial art world of galleries and auction houses (and new forms, such as direct-to-consumer e-commerce) will probably break out along the fault lines discov-

ered and created by Boone and Castelli. The trajectory of interdisciplinary art centers recently founded by powerful uber-collectors (e.g., Maja Hoffman's Luma Arles, Qiao Zhibing's Tank-Shangai) will follow paradigms laid down by Philippa de Menil's Dia Foundation. The rise of peer-to-peer funding mechanisms such as Patreon and Kickstarter, as well as the more recent proliferation of NFT marketplaces, represents a contemporary adaptation of the many-to-many, techno-media ethos that Wise helped to introduce into the realm of serious art-making.

But yet, even this meta-conclusion adapts a move from Meyer, who inserts himself into the writing of near history in the final pages of *What Was Contemporary Art?* His presence, however, is in a supporting role. The focus is instead given to the work of an African American artist, one whose work casts in a new light the argument revealed in the more deeply historical episodes. In Meyer's case, this light is literal. Glenn Ligon's glowing, polysemic text works become a means of introducing reflexive historiographic ambiguity (and an acknowledgment of the racial constructs therein) into the scene of the contemporary art opening. In a final gesture of homage, *Collecting the Now* ends with a parallel case study of the artist Theaster Gates and his activities. Gates's example is pivotal insofar as it reverses an implicit premise of the preceding pages: that economic condition may provide the parameters for art-making, but art practice has little power to alter broad financial circumstances. Gates's work draws on the paradigms of speculative collecting, foundation formation, and community organization that animated the previous chapters, but puts the artist in a position of central agency. *Pace* Gates, an artist may aim for a desired result of artistic-economic exchange, and then design a practice toward this end.

AN ORIGIN STORY

Theaster Gates was born in 1973 in the Garfield Park neighborhood of Chicago, the only son in a family with eight older sisters. Though Gates enjoyed a stable working-class upbringing, he bore firsthand witness to the destruction wrought by the war on drugs, which raged with particularly violence on Chicago's West Side during the 1980s. He was particularly moved by the wanton destruction of the neighborhood's storied architectural heritage, an effect of the Reagan-era policy of demolishing structures identified as "crack dens." This erasure of what Gates recalled "the most beautiful buildings in my neighborhood" inspired him to pursue an education in urban planning

at Iowa State University, a major to which he added the portentous supplemental study of ceramics.⁴

After subsequent education at the University of Cape Town (master's in religious studies) and in Tokoname, Japan (ceramics), Gates returned to Chicago in 1999. He took a job as an arts planner for the Chicago Transit Authority, and devoted himself to the craft of his ceramics on his own time. He quickly grew frustrated in both of these arenas. While the niche (and largely white) world of high-concept ceramics yielded few opportunities for meaningful growth, his position at the CTA provided him inadequate control over funds and insufficient means of achieving buy-in from the communities of color whom he had hoped to engage. Gates quit his job at the CTA and, in 2006, accepted a position as an arts programmer at the University of Chicago.

A watershed moment occurred for Gates the following year, when he secured his first major solo exhibition at the Hyde Park Arts Center, a community arts space situated just off of the U of C campus. In an exhibition entitled *Plate Convergence*, Gates presented the work of Shoji Yamaguchi, a master potter and Hiroshima survivor who had relocated to rural Mississippi and become involved in the civil rights movement. Gates brought in Yamaguchi's son, who emceed an evening in which guests were served a radical hybrid of traditional Japanese and American soul food—epitomized by black-eyed pea sushi—on Yamaguchi plates. But as it turned out, Yamaguchi was a carefully constructed fiction; his “son” was an actor hired by Gates to lend the evening an air of performative authenticity. Indeed, the artist himself claims to have been swept up into the fictionalizing aspect of the work. Because he “began to believe that the institute was real,” he felt himself able to tap into deeper layers of craft and, as a result, to fashion better pots.⁵

Beyond the novel approach to this mode of “fabricated authenticity,” two aspects that would become pivotal for Gates's mature work first coalesced in *Plate Convergence*. The first is the application of ceramics as a thoroughgoing metaphor, one in which the material of everyday existence is capable of being refashioned through the mind and the hands of an artist. As Gates explained in 2011:

4. John Colapinto, “The Real-Estate Artist: High-Concept Renewal on the South Side,” *New Yorker* (January 12, 2014), <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/01/20/the-real-estate-artist> (accessed 7/1/2018). It should be noted that Gates and his studio have declined to respond to repeated inquiries.

5. Colapinto, “The Real-Estate Artist.”

For a person who really jumps into clay, you start to think differently, you start to think that you have the capacity to transform everything. . . . Clay and its metaphor of transformation allowed me to imagine cities differently, [that I] as an artist had the capacity to change zoning policies, building codes that hadn't been looked at in a hundred years, change the psyche of a city around what a neighbourhood represented.⁶

And while the plasticity of clay functions as a metaphor for the power of a single actor to reshape raw material and thereby fashion an alternative future, the fictionalized character of Yamaguchi represents a moment of crystalizing the importance of narrative, and history, in this refashioning. Dating back to Gates's horror at the razing of the architectural heritage of his neighborhood, a manifestation of the erasure of the neighborhood's residents, the artist has been attuned to the importance of cultural as well as material continuity. It was this interplay—remaking the future by means of mining and reconfiguring the past—that would come to define Gates's mature artistic output.

BREAKING DOWN, BREAKING OUT

However, given the nature of Gates's work, it is only appropriate that the economic circumstances surrounding the *Plates* would have as much bearing on the artist's future work as the ideas intentionally mobilized in the project itself. In 2006, when Gates accepted his job at the University of Chicago, he moved into the Grand Crossing neighborhood, choosing his location for both its proximity to his new job and the price of the real estate. With intentions to build a ceramics studio in his home, Gates closed on a former candy store on South Dorchester Avenue for \$130,000. While Gates's purchase had been subsidized by a family loan, he still needed a mortgage, but he found that banks were reticent to extend credit for real estate in an ostensibly blighted neighborhood. Gates soon found himself saddled with what he refers to as a "ghetto loan," a mortgage with an interest rate of 14 percent.⁷

But if the former candy store had been purchased at the peak of the housing market, the bottom soon fell out. In 2008, Gates acquired the building

6. Quoted in Hesse McGraw, "Theaster Gates: Radical Reform with Everyday Tools," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, no. 30 (Summer 2012): 94.

7. McGraw, "Theaster Gates," 92.

next door—a two-story clapboard bungalow—for \$16,000. With this new addition, Gates possessed the beginnings of an artistic complex. He gutted the structure and recycled the wood into elegant floor-to-ceiling bookshelves to house his library. He began hosting salon nights with reimagined soul food, continuing the work of *Plate Convergence* as an unfolding series of events for both working-class neighbors and visitors from the Hyde Park intelligentsia.⁸

These salon nights—which were powered by Gates’s unique attention to the financial, material, and narrative dimension of an expanded art practice—became the basis of Gates’s Rebuild Foundation, which he officially chartered in 2009. At Iowa State, Gates had been deeply influenced by the work and writings of Samuel Mockbee, an Auburn University–based architect and activist. Mockbee’s widely admired Rural Studio Program mobilized graduate architecture students to design affordable housing for poor, African American communities out of recycled scrap materials. While engaged with the salon dinners, Gates encountered what architectural critic Susan Morris has described as the “city version” of Mockbee’s studio, Rick Lowe’s Project Row Houses in Houston. Like Mockbee, Lowe was invested in the ways in which high-quality design could improve housing stock, and by extension, the larger trajectory of a disadvantaged community. But Lowe added another dimension—the conceptualization of this revitalization as a kind of art practice. Indeed, by positioning his work as a platform for art-making, Lowe had been able to involve stakeholders including the NEA and the Menil Foundation to support his projects for urban renewal.⁹

Following these precedents, Gates launched the Rebuild Foundation as an official umbrella organization for the increasingly multifarious activities taking place within his practice. While continuing the dinners and performances, Gates was quickly securing a reputation as a kind of official arts and cultural archivist of the South Side. Like a cross between an aristocratic connoisseur and an urban activist, Gates began to do the work of housing and protecting endangered cultural heritage. His custom-rebuilt shelves became home to 14,000 art and architecture volumes from the recently closed Prai-

8. Ben Austen, “Chicago’s Opportunity Artist,” *New York Times Magazine* (December 2013), <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/22/magazine/chicagos-opportunity-artist.html> (accessed 7/1/2018).

9. Michael Kimmelman, “In Houston, Art Is Where the Home Is,” *New York Times* (December 17, 2006), <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/17/arts/design/17kimm.html> (accessed 7/1/2018). Susan Morris, “In Art We Trust,” *Architecture Newspaper* (November 2016), <https://archpaper.com/2016/11/theater-gates-architectural-league-ny/> (accessed 7/1/2018).

rie Avenue Bookshop. He acquired 8,000 vinyl records from funk and soul pillar Dr. Wax, which shut its doors in 2010. When the University of Chicago Art History Department switched to digital, it donated its 60,000 glass slides to Gates (along with assistance to reinforce his floors to support the new weight).¹⁰ For Gates, these new acquisitions radically expanded the possible scope of his interventions. Because of these new holdings, “my neighborhood might someday, be seen as an artistic hub for creative cultural happenings on the South Side of Chicago.”¹¹ Indeed, Gates was preparing this ground on multiple levels: a dual practice as both archivist and salon host positioned him both to preserve the past and reimagine the future of a community.

Significantly, Rebuild was chartered in the midst of Gates’s breakout as an international commercial artist. In January 2009, Gates had been invited to participate in a rotating emerging artist’s exhibition at Chicago’s Museum of Contemporary Art. While most artists typically imported a set of static objects into this space, Gates’s *Temple Exercises* was, according to Gates’s dealer Kavi Gupta, “so off the assumption of what that space should have been.”¹² Gates built a series of recycled palette pagodas as a performance set for the musical incarnation of Shoji Yamaguchi—a high-concept Zen/gospel/drone group called the Black Monks of Mississippi—who sang in the galleries every Tuesday evening. Gates also incorporated a “pilgrimage” into his exhibition—a museum-led excursion to the West Side shoeshine stand at which he was a regular. The museum informed visitors that, on the last Sunday of his show, “Theaster Gates invites you to get your shoes shined with him for \$5,” an event that led both to new kinds of cultural dialog and an enormous windfall for Gates’s beloved Shine King. The exhibition attracted packed crowds, and Gupta, a high-profile international dealer based in the city, signed Gates shortly thereafter. By November, Gates had been invited to participate in the prestigious Whitney Biennial and Gupta was successfully selling his work at the NADA Fair in Miami.¹³

10. Whitney Gaylord, “Lantern Slide Collection at the University of Chicago: An Inspired Path to Digitization and Reuse on Chicago’s South Side,” *VRA Bulletin* 42, no. 1 (December 2015): 1–2.

11. Theaster Gates, “Message from Rebuild Founder” (October 27, 2011), available at <https://rebuild-foundation.org/454-2/> (accessed 7/1/2018).

12. Colapinto, “The Real Estate Artist.”

13. Colapinto, “The Real Estate Artist.”

BUYING, SELLING, BUYING MORE

By this time, Gates was in the early stages of a meteoric ascent. The year following *Temple Exercises*, Gates secured a pair of solo exhibitions at major Midwest institutions, the Milwaukee Art Museum and the Pulitzer Foundation in St. Louis. The year after that, he mounted a second pair of solo shows—at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and at the Seattle Art Museum—while also becoming the first director of the University of Chicago’s newly launched Arts and Public Life Initiative, which had a mandate to “foster collaboration” between the university and “the civic, cultural and artistic communities” of Chicago’s South Side.¹⁴ In 2012, Gates began to show internationally—first at the prestigious White Cube gallery in London, and then at venues in Brazil, Hong Kong, Milan, Istanbul, and Basel. This whirlwind ascent was punctuated by Gates’s award of the 2018 Nasher Sculpture prize, one of the world’s most significant prizes in the field.

And as Gates cemented his status as an international art star, his work evolved with a new context and new horizons in mind. The thrust of his work remained consistent: deploying the ideas and vocabularies of the contemporary art world in service of articulating the struggles and possibilities of black experience. But whereas the sited-ness of the MCA Chicago had allowed Gates to put an art-world audience into direct contact with institutions like the Shine King, participation in the global flows of the elite art world entailed a shift in parameters. Gates’s work became more detached from its status as a performance prop, developing an assemblage-like aesthetic with its roots in the neo-Dada of Johns and Rauschenberg. In 2012, Gates participated in *Documenta XIII*, reconfiguring a prior installation of debris from his ongoing renovations on Dorchester Ave. This debris was used to restore an abandoned building in Kassel, Germany, and then reconfigured again as freestanding sculptural objects that Gupta sold for \$120,000 each. In 2015, Christies set a new benchmark for Gates, when an edition of his *In the Event of a Race Riot*—object collages composed out of discarded wooden frames, canvas, and old firehouse detritus—was hammered down for £250,000.¹⁵

14. Mission statement, “The Arts and Public Life,” available at <https://campaign.uchicago.edu/priorities/arts/arts-and-public-life/> (accessed 10/20/2020).

15. Tim Adams, “Chicago Artist Theaster Gates: ‘I’m hoping Swiss bankers will bail out my flooded South Side bank in the name of art,’” *The Guardian* (May 3, 2015), <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/may/03/theaster-gates-artist-chicago-dorchester-projects> (accessed 7/1/2018).

But different than the other high-dollar exchanges that this book has analyzed, Gates's practice is premised on reinvesting sales revenue back into the community-development work achieved by the Rebuild Foundation. By 2017, Gates's Foundation had mushroomed into a complex of more than thirty buildings employing a small army of both arts professionals and construction tradespeople. Indeed, Gates was particularly interested in cultivating building skills among the local population with, as the *New York Times* put it, "an eye toward" the forthcoming Barack Obama Presidential Library, for which Gates sat on the location selection committee.¹⁶ Rebuild's programming grew along with its expanded footprint; the organization now hosts regular concerts, screenings of African American cinematic works, and professional development seminars for artists. Rebuild also recently acquired 15,000 objects from the archives of Johnson Publishing (home to *Ebony* and *Jet* magazine), along with their important collection of art and design objects. These holdings have become the basis of historical exhibitions as well as raw material for Gates's art practice: his installation *Raising Goliath* counterbalanced a full-sized fire engine built in Peel, Arkansas, in 1967 with an equal weight of Johnson periodicals and firehouse ephemera.¹⁷

The apogee of this mode of practice came with Gates's acquisition of the former Stony Island State Savings Bank, a monumental neoclassical structure whose grandeur positioned it as an ideal stand-in, in the growing Rebuild universe, for the stately homes Gates was unable to save in his youth. Though the artist had wanted the bank "from Day One," its acquisition required a unique set of circumstances. Gates had maintained a political relationship with Chicago's controversial mayor Rahm Immanuel since the latter's election in 2011, a relationship cemented as their two stars began to drift in opposite directions. Gates's art-world rise coincided with Immanuel's worsening struggle to retain support from the African American communities on the South Side, and the two figures made political allies of one another. As Gates's studio manager explained in 2015, "Theaster needs the Mayor. But the Mayor needs Theaster."¹⁸ This position of mutual need was clearly illustrated by Immanuel's agreement to halt the bank's imminent

16. Hilarie Sheets, "Using Discards to Build Art (and Rebuild a City)," *New York Times* (March 14, 2017), <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/14/arts/design/theaster-gates-national-gallery-of-art-chicago.html> (accessed 7/1/2018).

17. Gil Leung, "Review: Theaster Gates's 'My Labor Is My Protest'" *Art Agenda* (October 2012), <https://www.art-agenda.com/reviews/theaster-gates-my-labor-is-my-protest/> (accessed 7/1/2018).

18. Colapinto, "The Real Estate Artist."

demolition and sell the condemned building to Gates for \$1, pending a plan for successful fund-raising and renovation. Though, as Gates pointed out, developers had been trying and failing for decades to make the numbers work on a rehabilitation, his position as an artist enabled him to develop a “vision beyond a kind of practical response.”¹⁹ For Gates, the bank could be saved as, and through, art.

The central tactic through which capital was raised to renovate the bank was the issuing of what Gates has termed both “Bank Bonds” and “Art Bonds,” pieces of marble reclaimed from the bank’s bathroom etched with the motto “In Art We Trust.” With shades of Duchamp’s *Fountain* as well as his *Monte Carlo Bond* hanging over the work, Gates convinced the White Cube gallery to drop its normal commission and sell one hundred bonds at Art Basel for \$5,000 each. While these marble fragments do not mark a debt obligation with a maturity date, they nevertheless retain the bond-like aspect of spreading an infrastructure project among a broad community of stakeholders. In this way, they function much like the Shine King pilgrimage, but increased by orders of magnitude. Whereas before Gates had been mobilizing the art world to spread its wealth into African American neighborhoods at an individual level, his new position enabled him to perform the same operation at an institutional scale. Through the sale of bonds, loans, and the use of his own resources, Gates has put \$4.5 million toward the renovation of the newly christened Stony Island Arts Bank, which has become the centerpiece of Rebuild, an arts, renovation, and community-building empire that employs sixty people and supports 60,000 visitors a year.²⁰

The soaring building has become a more fitting surround for the archives that Gates is continually building. Indeed, the most important acquisition since the opening of the bank drastically expanded the scope of Rebuild’s collections. Whereas before he had focused mostly on media- or document-based archives—books, LPs, art objects—Gates began to acquire material artifacts of the contemporary moment. For instance, he purchased the deconstructed gazebo under which the twelve-year-old Tamir Rice was shot by Cleveland police in 2014. In 2017, Gates launched *Objects of Care*, a series of public rituals around “caring for” the wooden remains.²¹ The results of

19. Colapinto, “The Real Estate Artist.”

20. Sheets, “Using Discards to Build Art (and Rebuild a City).”

21. This project was the subject of some controversy, as staff leaked to the press that they felt that internal discussions did not reflect the ethical complexity of advancing Rebuild’s mission by capitalizing on Rice’s shooting. See Christian Belanger, “Cracks in the Foundation: Former Employees of Theaster Gates’s Rebuild Foundation Allege Mistreatment,” *South Side Weekly*

a still unfolding practice of public mourning—which includes programming the gazebo with exhibitions of material drawn from Rebuild’s own holdings—comprise an expansive, haunting meditation on political injustice. In addition to its poignancy, *Objects of Care* bespeaks something significant about Rebuild and its ambition to serve as a locus for larger cultural memory. By housing study centers, craft studios, scholarly archives, and now a national memorial, Rebuild is growing into a new kind of institution, a hybrid museum and atelier dedicated to preserving and reimagining African American collective memory.

MARKET IDEA(OLOGY)

The rapid rise of Rebuild—which grew from a \$16,000 home into its status as an international arts ecosystem—has been predicated on a Gates’s turning the economics of contemporary art toward the aesthetic and ethical ends his practice dictated. But these economics have been far from stationary, and in fact Gate’s deflection of economic momentum figures his practice as a lens through which to attend to the recent transformations of the art market. Indeed, the \$16,000 real-estate acquisition itself throws into sharp relief one of the signature asymmetries of the business of art: while collapse of the American housing market catalyzed profound economic distress, the art market endured only one down year and then promptly returned to (brisk) business as usual. The downturn was in fact anomalous for having created any consequences whatsoever; other cyclical events between the 1990 crash described at the end of chapter 4 and the present COVID crisis did not dent the growth of the art market.²² While debate persists over the explanation for the ostensibly recession-proof nature of art sales, an important part of the explanation lies in the financialization first introduced by Boone, Taubman, and others during the 1980s. Over the course of the succeeding decades, art increasingly came to be seen as a valid means of risk-hedging and portfolio diversification; as the consultancy Deloitte noted in a 2016 report, over half of arts professionals now valued art assets for the financial protection they provided.²³

(May 23, 2017). <https://southsideweekly.com/cracks-in-theaster-gates-rebuild-foundation/> (accessed 7/1/2018).

22. Adrian Ash, “The Missing Collapse in the Art Market,” *Bullion Vault* (July 2012), <https://www.bullionvault.com/gold-news/art-treasure-072020127> (accessed 7/1/2018).

23. Deloitte, “Art and Finance Report” (2016), 96, available online at <https://www2.deloitte>.

As the world economy began to recover from 2008, the degree to which the art market had withstood one financial crisis after another began to attract attention from new corners of the world's financial elite. As investor and collector Jeffrey Gundlach observed in 2013, "a tiny fraction of the population in certain emerging economies," driven by mistrust of their national political and economic orders, had begun to invest substantial sums in the blue-chip art market.²⁴ Chinese buyers, who accounted for less than a quarter of a percent of total top-line revenue in 2004, comprised a quarter of the entire market by 2014.²⁵ African contemporary art grew during the same approximate period from virtually nothing into a multibillion-dollar sector.²⁶ Such growth entailed a striking concentration at the top sliver of the market, a shift both reflective of and produced by the ongoing consolidation of the world's wealth in the hands of a shrinking number of individuals. Between 2008 and 2018, the total revenue transacted in the art world grew by just under 10 percent, a period in which the number of transactions shrank by the same proportion.²⁷ The so-called "hockey stick" distribution was particularly well illustrated in 2018. Of the approximately \$60 billion spent on art in that year, close to 1 percent came from a single transaction, the sale of what is thought to be the last privately held da Vinci to the crown prince of Saudi Arabia. In the primary market, the same dynamic held: fewer than 5 percent of dealers accounted for more than 50 percent of the total revenue.²⁸

The desire to work within the logic and at the scale of this market deeply informed the ethos of Gates's practice. After the inevitable realization that his collectors were "just thinking about the market," Gates felt he had the

com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/Finance/gx-fsi-art-finance-report-2016.pdf (accessed 7/1/2018). See also Alexander Tammuni, "The Art of Alternative Investment—A New Asset Class," *Market Mogul* (September 2015), <https://themarketmogul.com/art-alternative-investment-new-asset-class/> (accessed 7/1/2018).

24. Svea Herbst-Bayliss, "What's behind the Spike in Art Sales: Vanity, Fear and Easy Money," Reuters (November 2013), <https://www.reuters.com/article/art-auction-hedgefunds/rpt-whats-behind-the-spike-in-art-sales-va-nity-fear-and-easy-money-idUSL2N0J002920131115> (accessed 7/1/2018). See also Nate Freeman, "Stranger in Moscow: Spying on a New Surge of Russian Collectors Buying Contemporary," *The Observer* (October 2014), <http://observer.com/2014/10/comrades-in-contemporary-art/> (accessed 7/1/2018).

25. Citibank, "The Global Art Market: Perspectives on Current Drivers and Future Trends" (November 2015), 4.

26. Lynsey Chutel, "Africa's Art Scene May Be Booming . . .," *Quartz Africa* (March 21, 2018), <https://qz.com/africa/1233539/africas-art-scene-may-be-booming-but-its-still-a-blip-on-the-global-market/> (accessed 12/15/2019).

27. Dr. Clare McAndrew, *TEFAF Art Market Report* (2019), 31.

28. McAndrew, *TEFAF Art Market Report* (2019), 50.

prerogative to conduct his practice in a transactional way. “I would,” he decided “leverage the fuck out of them as they were leveraging me.”²⁹ A dynamic of attempted exploitation is figured into the artist-patron relationship, and as such Gates came to design a system that would extract maximum value for his practice. As Sarah Newman, curator of Gates’s solo exhibition at the National Gallery, emphasizes, “he’s got the whole art world interested in him, and he is pointing everyone’s eyes at issues that he’s concerned with.” Thus, his unique strategic move to configure Rebuild—with its inter-related presences on the South Side of Chicago and in the international art world—so that patrons would feel that their aims were aligned to his own.

This aligning of interests reflexively redoubles the economic moment into which his work was born. On one level, the 2008 economic crises created both the need for and the possibility of something like Rebuild. Though it has since expanded its mandate, its founding collections came from cultural sites that had been pushed over the financial cliff by the subprime mortgage meltdown. As the director of Dr. Wax told an interviewer six months before Gates acquired its catalog, “Downloading hurt us, but the economy put us under.”³⁰ But as noted above, it was a peculiarity of circumstance that the art world was one of the few sectors of the economy that wasn’t visibly damaged by the 2008 downturn, and thus it was only fitting that Gates “leveraged” this situation to the benefit of those most vulnerable. Gates makes this point explicit in relationship with his *Bank Bonds*, telling an interviewer in 2015, “I found myself with a failed bank, and here I was being invited to Basel, the land where banking never failed.”³¹ Seen in a slightly broader frame, the Swiss fair becomes a metonym for the world of blue-chip contemporary art, where wealth, financial circumstances, and stimulus money insulated those at the top from the worst of the storm. The Rebuild Foundation is powered by and predicated on ameliorating this asymmetry, bending the arc of the ever-expanding art market toward greater economic justice.

In this way, Gates’s Rebuild provides a coda to the art-historical chapter opened by Leo Castelli, whose system was designed to foster meaningful growth in the prices of living American artists for the first time in history. This system opened a new art-historical epoch, in which the collecting class

29. Colpitano, “The Real Estate Artist.” See also discussion of Gates’s work in Gregory Sholette and Kim Charnley, *Delirium and Resistance: Activist Art and the Crisis of Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 132–38.

30. Staff, “A Farewell to Chicago’s Great Dr. Wax,” *Soul Tracks* (February 9, 2010), online at <https://www.soultracks.com/story-dr-wax-farewell> (accessed 7/1/2018).

31. https://www.artspace.com/magazine/interviews_features/qa/theaster-gates-interview-53126

(and the inter-related grant-making consort) made ever-increasing investments in the art of the present moment. As the world of post-Castelli wealth continued to accumulate, the question—illustrated by the shoving match between Rauschenberg and Scull—was largely over what share the living artists would capture. This antagonistic dynamic framed the choice of epigraph at the front of the Castelli chapter—a quotation from sociologist Marcel Mauss, who theorized the nature of exchange as situated within a larger tissue of sociocultural relationships. As Mauss writes, gifts may be given “away so as to able to possess yet other objects . . . that, in their turn, can be transformed again into money.” While this process of turning ersatz generosity back into selfish gain thematizes the tax-avoidance mechanism pioneered by Castelli and Scull, it reads Mauss’s ideas against their intended grain.³² A more faithful rendition would be something much closer to Gates’s work, in which objects are exchanged to bolster the interpersonal relationships through which a society is held together. Part of what Gates accomplished through Rebuild is to rethink the exchange of patronage from the perspective of artistic agency. In the worlds of Castelli and Boone (or even Dwan and Wise), the framing of this exchange nearly always positioned the artist as a product or an end user, a figure moving through a financial landscape over which she or he had little control. By contrast, Gates developed a method to redirect the momentum of the art market toward his own chosen ends.

It is for this reason that I leave the last words to the artist himself. As he explains, a system that would “leverage the fuck” out of the art world became necessary because of the scope of the problems he sought to address. For Gates, the work of the Rebuild Foundation becomes a means to answer “the slow erosion of the divine, the slow erosion of education, the slow erosion of family, the introduction of drugs, the introduction of a hopelessness that comes as a result of having economic centers and economic generators ripped from your neighborhood.” These are circumstances that necessarily overwhelm the paradigm of the isolated, Romantic artist—they require a redesign of the larger system. “Just to be in the studio when there’s a levee broken outside,” Gates insists, “would just be a waste of my hands.”³³

32. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Michael D. Halls (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), 74.

33. Staff, “Theaster Gates 2018 Laureate,” *Nasher Sculpture Center*. Accessible online at http://www.nashersculpturecenter.org/art/nasher-prize/laureates/laureate?id=72#_ftn6 (accessed 7/1/2018).

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