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Private Influence, Public Goods, and the Future of Art History

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to consider potential conflicts that arise when private wealth shapes the formation of cultural networks and decision-making. Drawing on examples from contemporary exhibition and museum practices, the author discusses the impact of private art collecting on the mission of public institutions and considers examples of the wider extension of collectors' influence in the art world. If one of the roles of the public museum is to preserve heritage for the interest and education of diverse audiences throughout time, it is important to question the collective and individual choices that underpin the creation of such cultural narratives as well as the social and financial forces that shape them. From the perspective of art history, however, this article sets out to explore concerns that the social meaning of art and its histories (past and future) are increasingly determined by a restricted group of agents whose institutions often lack transparency and public accountability. The extension of influence from the realm of private taste to that of public institution is a hallmark of the contemporary artworld and its philanthropic structures, including the founding of private museums. Taken together, these developments risk the creation of an art history from above, where the financial power of a circumscribed demographic translates into the promotion of specific intellectual, social, and aesthetic values for uncertain periods of time.

From the exercise of influence on museum boards, to loans of privately owned artworks, the selection of national representatives at international exhibitions, or the founding of single donor museums, the power of private collectors has expanded exponentially over the past two decades from the sphere of personal taste into the realm of public exhibition practices. The aim of this article is to consider potential conflicts that arise when

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private wealth shapes the formation of cultural networks and decision-making in these ways. Drawing on examples from contemporary exhibition and museum practices, I shall discuss the impact of private art collecting on the mission of public institutions and consider examples of the wider extension of collectors' influence in the art world.[1]

These issues are of particular importance in the contemporary creative sphere as they not only affect the lives and careers of individual artists, but also have repercussions on the future of art history. By this I mean the selection of artists whose works will, or will not, be considered of sufficient aesthetic value to become part of an enduring cultural imaginary. If one of the roles of the public museum is to preserve heritage for the interest and education of diverse audiences throughout time, it is important to question the collective and individual choices that underpin the creation of such cultural narratives as well as the social and financial forces that shape them.

A Question of Value

In her book, *The Shift*, Marta Gnyp identifies high net worth, cosmopolitan collectors as "the driving force behind the growth of the contemporary art market as they act in the networks of big auction houses and internationally operating galleries".[2] She charts not only a rise in the visibility of collectors and the extension of their influence within the twenty-first-century art world, but also a change in the act of collecting itself. In her account, collectors are no longer subject to the "delayed satisfaction" associated with a lengthy hold of artworks or the slow accumulation of cultural capital. Instead, they enjoy the "instant gratification" associated with the financial potential of art ownership.[3]

Gnyp's point is borne out by the prominent inclusion of investment data on auction house webpages. Alongside the provision of biographical information about Pablo Picasso, for example, Sotheby's website includes charts that show the median realized compound annual returns on investment in the artist's works and the realized compound annual returns on such works against defined holding periods.[4] The page sends a clear message that the artworks in question belong as much to a highly tradeable asset class – and, by extension, can function as a useful form of loan security – as they might

1 Earlier versions of arguments in this article were presented at "Private Collecting and Public Display: Art Markets and Museums" hosted by the Centre for the Study of the Art and Antiques Market, University of Leeds (March, 2017, http://csaam.leeds.ac.uk/) and at "The Global Power of Private Museums: Arts and Publics – States and Markets" hosted by the Forum Kunst und Markt, Technische Universität Berlin (December, 2017, https://www.fokum.org/symposium-the-global-power-of-private-museums/). I am grateful to the organizers of, and participants in, those events for their helpful feedback. I am particularly grateful to Alan Thomas for his invaluable comments on the political framework of this article.

2 Marta Gnyp, *The Shift: Art and the Rise to Power of Contemporary Collectors* (Stockholm: Art and Theory Publishing, 2015), 274. For the purposes of her study, Gnyp focuses on collectors who 'spend 50,000 Euros or more a year on art and yearly visit international art fairs' (34).

3 Ibid.

4 See Sotheby's website, https://www.sothebys.com/en/artists/pablo-picasso. Accessed 19 November 2018.

to a realm of prized objects historically associated with long-term possession by wealthy private buyers.[5]

This change in attitudes to art collecting from the early twentieth century to the present illustrates a point about the development of capitalism in Europe that was analyzed by John Maynard Keynes in 1919 and discussed more recently by James K. Galbraith. Keynes argues that prior to the First World War, the "new rich of the nineteenth century" did not accumulate wealth for the enjoyment of immediate consumption.[6] Rather, their principal aim was the acquisition of capital for the purpose of consolidating their financial position and extending their power over successive generations. With this ambition in mind, acts of philanthropic giving on the part of a close-knit community of wealthy individuals functioned as a means by which to maintain widespread confidence in a socio-economic system that enabled a small social cadre to accrue long-term financial advantage. As Keynes puts it:

> Herein lay, in fact, the main justification of the Capitalist System. If the rich had spent their new wealth on their own enjoyments, the world would long ago have found such a régime intolerable. But like bees they saved and accumulated, not less to the advantage of the whole community because they themselves held narrower ends in prospect.[7]

Galbraith explains the "double bluff" that Keynes exposes in this scenario: namely, that the very rich were allowed to accumulate vast capital because they "took on the obligation of saving, investing, and choosing the direction and scale of social progress".[8] However, as these obligations fell increasingly within the remit of state power in the latter half of the twentieth century (in the form, for example, of social welfare and public investment in arts and infrastructure), the wealthy elites of Western Europe and the United States were, Galbraith argues, dispossessed of their social powers and obligations yet retained both their wealth and the ability to increase it (notably through a succession of favourable tax regimes). In contrast to the focus on saving and consolidation that Keynes identified as existing prior to the First World War, the twentieth century ended with a "consumption binge" in which the rich triumphed "without resuming their former positions of social obligation, without resuming their former posture of industrious restraint".[9] This socio-political narrative neatly tracks the development of art collecting and the transformation of art into a commodity suitable for a short-term hold and financial

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5 On the increasing use of art as a form of loan security, see Georgina Adam, In debt we trust: the rise of art-secured lending, in *The Art Newspaper*, 6 December 2018. https://www.theartnewspaper.com/analysis/in-debt-we-trust-the-rise-of-art-secured-lending. Accessed 7 December 2018.

6 John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* [1919] (Petersfield: Harriman House, 2010), II: 20.

7 Ibid.

8 James K. Galbraith, *Created Unequal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 183.

9 Ibid, 185.

gain. In the second and third sections of this article, I shall be concerned with the ways in which contemporary philanthropy and the founding of private museums contribute to this development.

Focusing on collectors' own public self-fashioning in a book that examines the dynamics of Art Basel, *When Art Meets Money*, Franz Schultheis, Erwin Single, Stephan Egger, and Thomas Mazzurana argue that "the 'consumers' of art have [...] outstripped the producers and taken up center stage in the art world".[10] In support of their argument, they note that the individuals who are most visible at Art Basel are neither artists nor dealers, but collectors. The latter are, they argue, the protagonists of the event, with the result that the fair itself has become primarily a stage for the public "self-presentation of an increasingly consolidated global economic-cultural elite".[11]

The celebrity quality that attaches to elite collectors is not new in the art world and has long served as part of the marketability of art. In 1982, art dealer Mary Boone famously exhibited the names of collectors next to artworks they had bought, and Don Thompson has recently highlighted the social cachet that attaches to being part of a small group of individuals who own one of a limited edition of works (the restricted circle of ownership of Jeff Koons's *Balloon Dog* series is a case in point).[12] Further illustrating this theme, in 2016–17 the Musée d'art moderne et contemporain in Strasbourg staged an exhibition titled "L'Œil du collectionneur" ("The Eye of the Collector") that showcased the personalities, tastes, and collecting strategies of a selection of local private collectors.[13] In each of these examples, audiences are invited to contemplate the profiles of collectors, their biographies, and their acquisition strategies rather than the artworks that make up their collections.

Added to the increasing celebrity status of private collectors is the sheer theatricality of auction house sales. As news about, and the social media coverage of, the top end of the art market increases, so too public focus on the mounting sale prices of individual works, including their associated bidding wars, have become objects of interest in their own right. In his report on the Christie's sale of David Hockney's *Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)* for just over $90 million in November 2018, Will Gompertz quotes from his interview with the art dealer Stephen Howes that the sale "further cements

10 Franz Schultheis, Erwin Single, Stephan Egger and Thomas Mazzurana, *When Art Meets Money: Encounters at the Art Basel,* trans. James Fearns (Cologne: Walter König, 2015), 99.

11 Ibid, 101. On the subject of social ties and the pricing of art at art fairs see Christian Margner, The Art Fair as Network, in *The Journal of Arts, Management, Law, and Society*, 44:1 (2014), 33–46.

12 The point about Mary Boone's exhibition strategy is noted by Ethan Wagner and Thea Westrich Wagner in *Collecting for Love, Money and More* (London: Phaidon, 2013), 79. Don Thompson, *The Orange Balloon Dog: Bubbles, Turmoil and Avarice in the Contemporary Art Market* (London: Aurum Press, 2018), 20–1.

13 Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Strasbourg (France), "L'œil du collectionneur", 17 September 2016 – 26 March 2017. https://www.musees.strasbourg.eu/l-il-du-collectionneur. Accessed 7 December 2018. On connections between collecting and celebrity see also Georgina Adam, *Big Bucks: The Explosion of the Art Market in the 21st Century* (Farnham: Lund Humphries, 2014), 10 and 30–4.

Hockney's place in the highest echelons of art history".[14] Traditionally, the acquisition of a work by a public museum was deemed to be a key indicator of an artist's importance and the symbol of an artwork's value – the latter's removal from the market signalling its status as "invaluable".[15] Howes's comment marks a shift from that view by postulating financial value as the ultimate arbiter of aesthetic worth and, by extension, as the primary marker of a work's art historical significance.[16] On this view, the auction house has become the primary stage on which attainment of that status marker is performed, observed, and endorsed by artworld professionals, collectors, and audiences for whom the spectacle of the sale is publicized.

The purported connection between the acquisition price of a work and its aesthetic value is a recognizable piece of market rhetoric. In the interviews mentioned above carried out by Schultheis and his colleagues, elite collectors at Art Basel claimed to be in the presence of art that was "the best", "the highest quality", and "incomparable" – descriptions that were inextricably linked to the market value of the works of show and to the VIP nature of the event itself.[17] Their comments reinforce a statement made in 2006 by Tobias Meyer (the then Worldwide Head of Contemporary Art at Sotheby's) reported by Sarah Thornton: "The best art is the most expensive, because the market is so smart".[18] As art becomes increasingly commodified and artists themselves are recognized as global "brands", the market has developed a self-reinforcing logic.[19] The prices set and achieved by art dealers and auctioneers (including the advertising of financial guarantees that underpin certain auction sales) are taken as key indicators by financiers who are willing to accept art as security for the extension of loans. Put another way, conversations between

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14 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-46232870 (accessed 26 November 2018).

15 It must be noted, however, that numerous biases and pre-conceptions about the types of art that are of "museum quality" have also shaped the histories of public collections.

16 In return, Christie's promotional material emphasized the museum quality of the work, drawing attention to its successful exhibition at both Tate Britain in London and the Centre Pompidou in Paris. Christie's noted that the work had "appeared in numerous retrospectives, and in 2017 was the cover image for the catalogue accompanying Tate Britain's retrospective, *David Hockney* (which toured to the Centre Pompidou in Paris and the Met in New York). The show attracted almost half a million people, becoming Tate's most visited exhibition ever". https://www.christies.com/features/David-Hockney-Portrait-of-an-Artist-Pool-with-Two-Figures-9372-3.aspx (Accessed 26 November 2018). See also Ethan Wagner and Thea Westrich Wagner: "Today … there is a prevalent belief among many art collectors that when an artist's prices increase substantially that development alone – ipso facto – indicates the artist's historical importance. Essentially, the value markers have been reversed". *Collecting for Love, Money and More*, 83.

17 Schultheis, et al., *When Art Meets Money*, 99.

18 Sarah Thornton, Love and Money, in *Art Forum*, May 11, 2006. https://www.artforum.com/diary/sarah-thornton-on-sotheby-s-contemporary-evening-sale-10968. Accessed 3 December 2018.

19 Consider, for example, the boost to Damien Hirst's sales and marketing strategy traced by Uta Protz in her essay *Beautiful Inside My Head Forever:* The Realignment of the Artist and the Art Market in Great Britain in the Twenty-First Century, in: Charlotte Gould and Sophie Mesplède, eds., *Marketing Art in the British Isles, 1700 to the Present* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 83–100. Protz focuses on Hirst's appointment of Frank Dunphy as a business manager and the resulting creation of Hirst as a "global brand" prior to two major Sotheby's auctions: the first of items from Hirst's Pharmacy restaurant in 2004 and the second *Beautiful Inside My Head Forever* in 2008 (90–95).

financial intermediaries have become the focus for determining the worth of an artist and his or her works.

The idea that financial value is a key determinant of aesthetic value is a potent, but troubling idea in the contemporary art world. As the director Nathaniel Kahn notes in an interview given in connection with his HBO documentary *The Price of Everything* (2018), recent years have seen "the intense commodification of art" with the result that the prices of artworks are now taken as signs of their intrinsic value.[20] It is, of course, in the interests of auction houses and dealers to promote this view. If a collector is to pay a high price for a work, he or she must be induced to believe in its exemplary aesthetic merit. If this point were confined to the market, it might not be problematic. More worrying is the impact of this logic on both public and private exhibition culture and, by extension, on the choice of works that are deemed important for audiences across time and geographies.

In the context of privately owned museums, adherence to market logic results in collectors reinforcing the reputation of the same group of artists and/or promoting a particular style of work (i.e. those that are highly prized at auction or at art fairs). As the former director of Tate Modern, Chris Dercon, notes: "With some exceptions, today's private museums for contemporary art are clones. Their contents are interchangeable, with the same artists and distinctly undifferentiated works".[21] If collectors follow each other's tastes and collecting habits – as they are prompted to do by dealers and auction houses who promote a narrow range of artists at the top end of the market – both the contents of their collections and of privately-funded museums run the risk of becoming increasingly repetitive. Iain Robertson reinforces the point in *New Art New Markets* when he describes the conflation of the museum and the art market as producing a "formulaic cultural Esperanto" understood by artworld insiders who inhabit a homogeneous global culture.[22] That culture is driven by a sector of the art market that promotes a rarefied group of artists for the purpose of maximizing profits. As Alessia Zorloni and Antonella Ardizzone have compellingly argued, the market for contemporary art is a "winner-take-all" environment in which a small number of artists command the highest prices and are identified as the most successful "brands".[23]

This imbrication of financial and aesthetic worth may be unsurprising in the context of private collecting, particularly as it operates as a means of presenting a consolidated idea

20 Eleanor Laurence, Interview, Nathaniel Kahn on the Value of Art, https://www.hbo.com/documentaries/the-price-of-everything/nathaniel-kahn-interview. Accessed 26 November 2018.

21 Chris Dercon, Afterword, in Christina Bechtler and Dora Imhof, eds., *The Private Museum of the Future* (Zurich and Dijon: JRP Ringier and Les Presses du réel, 2018), 186–198 (189).

22 Iain Robertson, *New Art New Markets* (London: Lund Humphries, 2018), 19.

23 Alessia Zorloni and Antonella Ardizzone, The Winner-Take-All Contemporary Art Market, in *Creative Industries Journal*, 9:1 (2016), 1–14 (3). DOI: 10.1080/17510694.2016.1154651.

about value that reduces the risk associated with art acquisition.[24] Yet the same market logic also has consequences for publicly funded institutions. In a report published in July 2018, Sébastien Montabonel and Dina Vives link the focus on art as a financial commodity to the withdrawal of public funding for museums in many parts of the world. The publicity that attaches to works with high price tags gives those works prominence in public discourses about art. The result, Montabonel and Vives argue, is that "commercially prominent work is becoming the norm in public and private museums as well as galleries, bringing quality and financial value ever closer".[25] As the financial independence of museums is eroded and the spectacle of art sales increases, so the influence of private gallerists and collectors as controllers of information becomes an increasingly powerful determinant of the broader cultural landscape.[26]

In support of this, one might point to retrospectives at public museums accorded to some of the highest grossing contemporary artists over the past five years including Gerhard Richter, Jeff Koons, and Damien Hirst or to the proliferation of exhibitions at both public museums and private galleries devoted to historical figures whose works continue to command some of the highest market prices (a glance at the number of solo exhibitions devoted to Jean Michel Basquiat and Pablo Picasso over the past five years illustrates the point).[27] The consequence of this convergence of museum values and market logic is that collectors (and the market apparatus designed to appeal to them) are no longer simply arbiters of taste, but agents in the determination of broader museum strategies and, ultimately, of art history itself. This point is concerning given the biases of the market in favouring particular kinds of art and or artists, particularly as regards the latters' gender and ethnicity.[28]

The influence of wealthy collectors also extends to the impact of their presence on museum boards, as lenders to exhibitions, and as financial donors. This, in turn, raises

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24 Zorloni and Ardizzone describe this as the impact of "celebrity effect" on collectors: "This celebrity effect is the result of the new collectors' common practice of reducing search and information costs by only purchasing recognized works or those by famous artists. By doing so, new buyers can rely on preferences established by previous successful buyers, hence reducing the risk and insecurity inherent in relying on their own taste". The Winner-Take-All Contemporary Art Market, 4.

25 Sébastien Montabonel and Diana Vives, *When Financial Products Shape Cultural Content* (London: Alaska Editions, 2018), 25.

26 On the role of "information asymmetry" see Montabonel and Vives, *When Financial Products Shape Cultural Content*, 16 and Zorloni and Ardizzoni, The Winnter-Take-All Contemporary Art Market, 1–3.

27 On the impact of the market and of private collecting on the careers of individual artists see also Adam, *Big Bucks*, 85.

28 See, for example, the recent analyses relating to gender and the art market undertaken by Fabian Bocart, Marina Gertsberg, and Rachel Ann Jane Pownall, Glass Ceilings in the Art Market (27 August 2018). Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3079017 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3079017 (Accessed 26 November 2018) and Renée B. Adams, Roman Kraeussl, Marco A. Navone, and Patrick Verwijmeren, Is Gender in the Eye of the Beholder? Identifying Cultural Attitudes with Art Auction Prices (6 December 2017). Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3083500 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3083500 (Accessed 26 November, 2018). See also Amelia Jones, On Sexism in the Art World, in: *Art News*, 26 May, 2015. http://www.artnews.com/2015/05/26/on-sexism-in-the-art-world/. Accessed 3 December, 2018.

questions about the responsibilities that museums have to funders, to a broader set of stakeholders and, in particular, to their diversely constituted audiences throughout time. In his book *The Orange Balloon Dog*, Don Thompson discusses the interests to which museums increasingly appeal:

> For museums, the most important customers are not potential museum-goers. Rather they are donors, in the same way that the important customers for newspapers are not readers but advertisers. [...] As every MBA student learns, to find out what business an organization is in, you ask, "What is the revenue model? Where does the money come from?" The revenue provider is the customer.[29]

Thompson offers a bleak view of the contemporary museum industry. The pressure to bolster funds by turning to private financial support results, he argues, in a drive to cater to the needs of those investors, thereby reducing curatorial risk-taking and strengthening the influence of those in possession of private capital.

Philanthropy, Power, and Social Goods

This shift of power from a realm of private interest to public influence illustrates a theory proposed by Michael Walzer in his book *Spheres of Justice*. As art collectors move from the accumulation of economic capital to that of cultural capital, a transference of goods and power occurs that Walzer characterizes in the following terms:

> Physical strength, familial reputation, religious or political office, landed wealth, capital, technical knowledge: each of these, in different historical periods, has been dominant; and each of them has been monopolized by some group of men and women. And then all good things come to those who have the one best thing. Possess that one, and the others come in train. Or, to change the metaphor, a dominant good is converted into another good, into many others, in accordance with what often appears to be a natural process but is in fact magical, a kind of social alchemy.[30]

My suggestion is that this problematic "social alchemy", as Walzer puts it, is indicative of a particular trend within art collecting and museum culture, namely, a shifting of public heritage into private hands. This is a trajectory of oligarchic economic power that maps onto developments associated with the evolution of twentieth-century capitalism. Yet, in the context of the twenty-first-century art world, this does not equate to the pairing of patrimonial capital with the fulfilment of social obligation that characterized smaller, more cohesive societies prior to the First World War as described by Keynes. Rather, this contemporary "social alchemy" supports the consolidation of financial power and cultural influence exercised by the wealthy.

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29 Thompson, *The Orange Balloon Dog*, 63. On the role of private donors on museum boards see also John Zarobell, *Art and the Global Economy* (Oakland CA: University of California Press, 2017), 37–9.

30 Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 11.

A starting point for consideration of this theme is the role of the famous Parisian department store Galeries Lafayette as a patron of contemporary art. In 2013, the owners of the Lafayette group, the Moulin Family (acting through the Moulin Family Endowment Fund and the Fondation d'entreprise Galeries Lafayette), established an exhibition and cultural centre in Paris called Lafayette Anticipations.[31] While collecting is typically conceived as an activity that occurs *after* an artwork is produced, Lafayette Anticipations is an incubator (described on its website as a "multidisciplinary artistic center") that supports contemporary creative activities from their inception.[32] It is housed in a building that once belonged to another old, but equally famous nineteenth-century Parisian department store, the Bazar de l'Hotel de Ville. In a pre-launch introduction to the design of the repurposed building (designed by Rem Koolhas), the President of Lafayette Anticipations, Guillaume Houzé, made a connection between nineteenth-century social modernity and twenty-first-century art and commerce:

> Lafayette Anticipations, Fondation d'entreprise Galeries Lafayette believes that this encounter will sharpen our view of the present and engage in the modern dynamic that runs parallel to what has always driven great department stores since their invention. While none of us knows exactly what the future holds, I believe in the strength of creative collaboration and what it can contribute to making the most innovative ideas realities.[33]

By explicitly embedding Lafayette Anticipations in a history of the Parisian department store, Houzé draws on a familiar set of social and economic ideas associated with the development of Paris as an icon of modernity – and, of course, the role of Galeries Lafayette itself in the development of that idea. This narrative of modern life is a familiar feature of French cultural production of the late nineteenth century, epitomized by Émile Zola's novel *Au Bonheur des dames* of 1883 and, indeed, by the exhibition and sale of art in Parisian department stores such as Au bon marché and the Grands magasins du Louvre.[34]

Although the ambitions of Lafayette Anticipations are embedded in ideals of innovation, the rhetoric of the enterprise draws on terms, projects, and even buildings anchored in a late nineteenth-century framework. There is considerable irony in this connection. In his book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, economist Thomas Piketty describes the recent evolution of France's economy as a return to the Belle Époque. While the three decades

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31 According to its website, Lafayette Anticipations is run by the Fondation d'entreprise Galeries Fayette and the Fonds de dotation Famille Moulin. https://www.lafayetteanticipations.com/en/place-production. Accessed 3 December 2018.

32 For further information, see the description of the Centre on its webpage: https://www.lafayetteanticipations.com/en/place-production. Accessed 3 December 2018.

33 A Word from Guillaume Houzé. https://lafayetteanticipation1.squarespace.com/the-word-of-guillaume-houze/. Accessed 29 March, 2017.

34 For a discussion of art display in nineteenth-century Parisian department stores see Anca Lasc, *Interior Decorating in Nineteenth-Century France: The Visual Culture of a New Profession* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), chapter 4.

after the Second World War saw the emergence of a state capitalism in which the largest French firms ceased to be privately owned, the balance changed in the 1980s. State ownership of corporations was reduced, financial markets were deregulated, the market for goods and services was liberalized, and – in consequence – private wealth rose dramatically. As Piketty puts it: "France became the promised land of the new private-ownership capitalism of the twenty-first century".[35] As that ratio of public to private capital has shifted over the past thirty years, so too the future of public heritage has been increasingly shaped by private hands. In the context of the art world, the Louis Vuitton Foundation (owned by the LVMH Foundation) and the transformation of the old Paris Bourse into an exhibition space to house the collection of François Pinault are good examples of this trend. In these cases, the financial power of the institutions' private backers both to acquire new works and to fund the loans of artworks from other institutions exceeds the budget of many public museums.

Illustrating an extension of its own cultural influence, the Lafayette group has partnered with various artists both in connection with the promotion of its own brand and in broader art world contexts. In 2016, the store appointed contemporary artists Maurizio Cattelan and Pierpaolo Ferrari under the banner of the duo's magazine *ToiletPaper* to launch a rebranding of the store's visual identity. This included the design of window displays, an in-store exhibition, and the installation of a temporary sculpture in the store's famous cupola. The installations garnered significant international coverage in both the art and general press. While some of the works on show were controversial, the partnership between art and commerce was familiar. As Rachel Bowlby has noted in her studies of the evolution of the department store in Europe and the United States, window displays often functioned as a "setting for stylish modern art" while also aiming to stimulate consumer action at the "point of purchase".[36] In the twenty-first century, little seems to have changed: the department store and artistic production meet in a moment of mutual brand reinforcement designed to generate interest in artists, their patrons, and the "products" supplied by each of them.

Building on its reputation for artistic patronage, Galeries Lafayette was the official partner of the French Pavilion at the 2017 Venice Biennale. A press release made clear the Group's long-term relationship to the selected artist (Xavier Veilhan) and that the former's activities were envisaged as part of an active shaping of the artworld both then and into the future. In 2016, Veilhan had installed a large-scale work, *Light Machine*, in Galeries Lafayette's main building in Paris, and the artist later contributed a short film to a project documenting the transformation of the building to house Lafayette Anticipations.[37] The relationship between the department store and the artist was, therefore, reinforced and advertised in a number of different ways both inside the Group's main

35 Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthus Goldhammer (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014), 138.

36 Rachel Bowlby, *Carried Away*: *The Invention of Modern Shopping* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 61.

37 https://www.lafayetteanticipations.com/en/exposition/mutant-stage.

store and beyond it. In addition to issues concerning the cross-branding involved in a corporation–artist relationship, the question arises as to whether the provision of financial support grants a donor the privilege of influencing a nation's representative at a prestigious art exhibition such as the Venice Biennale and, thereby, leaving a lasting imprint on the artworld?

This point was the subject of debate in Australia in 2017 following an announcement by the Australia Council of a new process for selecting the country's representative at the 2019 Venice Biennale. The Council announced that the selection would be by way of an open call and that the choice of the nation's representative would be made by a team of assessors whose details would be made public. This development caused consternation to some of the donors who had in the past not only provided substantial funding for the construction of the Australian Pavilion, but also had a major influence over the choice of artist. The essence of the complaint was made in a press release on 30 October 2017 by the Balnaves Foundation, namely, the erosion of the sponsor's right to determine the choice of artist. In addition to the withdrawal of support by the Balnaves Foundation, Simon Mordant, a UK banker based in Australia and former commissioner of the country's representative at the Biennale, also withdrew his support.[38]

The debate that ensued in Australia raised an important question for the contemporary art world, namely, what power should accompany financial support of the arts? Rupert Myer (Chairman of the Australia Council) summed up the predicament as follows:

> In a general sense, I've always thought that sponsorship is the deal and philanthropy is the gift. The sharp distinction is the sponsor has an expectation of return. What you might choose to provide philanthropically is the gift. Of course, both have the right to choose not to support something.[39]

Illustrating Walzer's point made at the beginning of this section, these examples highlight the translation of economic power into cultural influence on the part of philanthropists who devote both time and money to the arts. The terms "philanthrocapitalism" or "venture philanthropism" may appear to be oxymorons, but they epitomize the issue that financial support is now often explicitly associated with the exercise of control on the

38 For a report on the impact of the change in process see Elizabeth Fortescue, Top Australian donors pull funding from Venice Biennale, in *The Art Newspaper*, 27 November 2017. https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/top-australian-donors-pull-funding-from-venice-biennale. Accessed 7 December 2018. As Jeremy Eccles notes in an article published in the Australian *Financial Times* in December 2013, the commissioner of the country's representative at the Biennale had historically been someone with a visual arts background. In 2013, however, Mordant became the first banker to take on the role. Banker Simon Mordant on the new Australian pavilion in Venice, in *Financial Times* (Australia). https://www.ft.com/content/01e448c2-5cdc-11e3-a558-00144feabdc0. Accessed 7 December 2018.

39 Rupert Meyer quoted in Jemima Whyte, Venice Biennale artist selection causes arts donors stoush, in *Financial Review*, 3 November 2017. https://www.afr.com/lifestyle/arts-and-entertainment/this-is-not-a-family-squabble-20171103-gze15a. Accessed 7 December 2018.

part of the giver.[40] As such, art "sponsorship" risks becoming a form of cultural domination by a cadre of high net worth capital holders who have the power to shape both the market in which they operate and the venues in which art is exhibited. This is far from the model of "industrious restraint" that characterized the execution of social obligations by the wealthy in the early part of the twentieth century.[41] As John Zarobell notes:

> Museum trustees, boards of directors, and the like are not, and perhaps never were, disinterested third parties. As donors, whether of art or money, they have the role of overseeing the governance of the institution. [...] The result is that those who possess the greatest resources have the most power to direct the activities of the institution, though this influence is usually wielded as "soft power".[42]

While the exertion of power on museum boards or national selection committees is part of this process, the shaping of a private museum culture is another important aspect of this trend as the final section of this article will argue.

Privatizing Museum Culture

Questions associated with the powers attaching to philanthropy come to the fore with greater force in the context of private museums. In *The Private Museum of the Future,* a series of interviews with the founders of selected private museums, one question is answered in a similar way by most of the interviewees, despite differences in the ways in which their organizations are structured and the places in which they are located. When asked "What can a private museum do, that public institutions cannot?", interviewees stress the flexibility of their institutions, their spontaneity, and the speed with which they can respond to issues and opportunities.[43] While this is viewed as a positive attribute of private museums, it can also be said to have a downside. Speed and response time are typically associated with market decisions rather than long-term processes. While the curators and trustees of public museums make choices about the development of their collections via extensive committee deliberation, private museums can develop swiftly according to the changing desires and interests of the individuals who own them. The latter is not necessarily a problem, but it does raise the question of how collections are shaped over the long-term and how they are intended to address the interests of diverse publics across generations.

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40 For some of the controversies to which this gives rise see Gavin Fridell and Martijn Konings, eds., *Age of Icons: Exploring Philanthrocapitalism in the Contemporary World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013). See also Jacques Defourny, Marthe Nyssens and Severine Thys, Venture philanthropy: When philanthropy meets social entrepreneurship, in Tobias Jung, Susan D. Phillips and Jenny Harrow, *The Routledge Companion to Philanthropy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 348–361. For a discussion of the role of familial wealth in the exercise of cultural power by corporations see Chin-Tao Wu, *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention Since the 1980s* (London and New York: Verso, 2003), 9–12.

41 See Galbraith, *Created Unequal*, 185.

42 Zarobell, *Art and the Global Economy*, 39.

43 Bechtler and Imhof, *The Private Museum of the Future*, 32, 38, 43, 69, 76, 84, 116, 136, 169, 178.

Debates that surrounded the opening of the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa in Cape Town in 2017 exemplify these issues. The institution describes itself as a "public not-for-profit contemporary art museum which collects, preserves, researches, and exhibits twenty-first century art from Africa and its Diaspora".[44] The museum was designed by British architect, Thomas Heatherwick and comprises the private collection of former CEO of the sports brand, Puma, Jochen Zeitz. With its focus on twenty-first-century-African art, the museum fills an important gap in the country's creative landscape. It has been described in the press as South Africa's answer to London's Tate Modern and to New York's Museum of Modern Art.[45] The museum's acquisition policy and the long-term impact of its central mission have, however, garnered controversy. Zeitz himself has stressed the hybrid nature of the institution: "It's a public museum with a private collection".[46] In other words, a museum that is created "for Africa" is based around an individual collector's vision of that country and its creativity.

The establishment of a museum in a newly developed tourist area of Cape Town suits the financial ambitions of the property developer, V&A Waterfront. As John Zarobell notes, while artworks benefit from the epithet "museum status", the buildings in which the works are housed are also significant real estate investments in their own right.[47] Yet the more pressing question concerns the long-term prospects of the art collection itself. Will the collection of the Zeitz MOCAA constitute an objective and durable history of African art post 2000? Early publicity for the museum (and, indeed, the V&A Waterfront's own webpage) stated that Zeitz had gifted his art collection to the museum in perpetuity. More recent information clarifies that he has made a loan for twenty years or for the period of his lifetime (whichever longer).[48] The core of the collection appears, therefore, to be temporary and gifts are being sought from other collectors and from artists themselves. What are the implications of the collection's provisional status for the museum, its publics, and the artists whose works are collected?

Public museums publish their acquisition policies and must adhere to rules about deaccessioning works from their collections, but that is not always the case for museums de-

44 Zeitz museum website: https://zeitzmocaa.museum/about-us/ Accessed 7 December 2018.

45 See "Africa's Tate Modern"– Cape Town's Zeitz-Mocaa gallery opens, in *The Guardian*, 21 September 2017,, https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2017/sep/21/cape-town-zeitz-mocaa-art-museum-africa-open-september-2017. Accessed 7 December 2018. *Blouin Artinfo*, Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art is the African Competitor of MomA, 19 October, 2017, https://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/2606877/zeitz-museum-of-contemporary-art-is-the-african-competitor-of. Accessed 7 December 2018.

46 Khanya Mtshali, Africa's largest museum for modern art opens this month in a former grains silo, in *Quartz Africa*, https://qz.com/africa/1082692/zeitz-mocaa-is-the-largest-museum-housing-contemporary-african-art-on-the-continent/. Accessed 7 December 2018.

47 Zarobell, *Art and the Global Economy*, 52.

48 See "Africa's Tate Modern" – Cape Town's Zeitz-Mocaa gallery opens. https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2017/sep/21/cape-town-zeitz-mocaa-art-museum-africa-open-september-2017. Accessed 18 December 2018.

rived from private collections.[49] Martin Z. Margulies, for example, is quite explicit about the limited lifespan of the exhibition of his private collection in The Warehouse, Miami. As the website explains, The Warehouse is simply a "thirty-year resource for the study and enjoyment of the visual arts".[50]

In her essay "Radical Museology", Claire Bishop points out that this type of collecting structure has precedent: from the Musée du Luxembourg's self-fashioning in the nineteenth century as the "Musée des artistes vivants" ("Museum of Living Artists") to Alfred H. Barr Jr's original conception of MoMA as a museum where works would be deaccessioned after 50 years; or the New Museum in New York – a "non-collecting" institution that describes itself as having evolved a position between "a traditional museum and an alternative space".[51] As Bishop notes, the semi-permanent collection is, in essence, an "anti-collection": by allowing works to flow in and out, it refuses "a correct or authoritative story of contemporary art".[52] This approach has the potential to unsettle familiar histories of art in productive ways. Yet, the troubling issue is that the exhibition activities and public faces of many private museums *do* claim authoritative museum status even though they are derived from the personal tastes, financial interests, and public reputations of their owners.[53] As Chris Dercon puts it:

> The private sector almost always adheres to priorities widely different from those of public institutions. It often prefers the production of cultural industry, which, rather

49 For some of the controversies surrounding deaccessioning see the essays in Julia Courtney, ed., *Is it Okay to Sell the Monet? The Age of Deaccessioning in Museums* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018). See also Zarobell, *Art and the Global Economy*, 52.

50 Quoted from the website of The Margulies Collection at The Warehouse. https://www.margulieswarehouse.com/#/home. Accessed 7 December 2018. See also the comments made by Eli Broad in an interview with Connie Bruck in 2010: "Broad told me that he does not plan to have a general foundation in perpetuity, like Rockefeller and Ford. 'Henry Ford would turn over in his grave if he saw what was happening,' Broad said. 'We don't want people we've never met, who don't understand our philosophy or views or dreams, to have this money'." Connie Bruck, The Art of the Billionaire: How Eli Broad Took Over Los Angeles, in *The New Yorker*, 6 December 2010. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/12/06/the-art-of-the-billionaire. Accessed 2 January 2019.

51 See the history of the New Museum on its website: https://www.newmuseum.org/history. Accessed 18 December 2018. On the subject of MoMA and deaccessioning see also Jeffrey Weiss, 9 Minutes 45 Seconds, in Bruce Altschuler, ed., *Collecting the New: Museums and Contemporary Art* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 41–54 (48); Martin Gammon, *Deaccessioning and its Discontents* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2018), 28–9.

52 Claire Bishop, *Radical Museology, Or, What's Contemporary in Museums of Contemporary Art* (London: Koenig, 2013) 15.

53 See the comment made in Claire Bouchara, Max Bossier, Christine Howald, Shasha Liu, Christoph Noe, Kaisha Woo, Cuiyun Xu, Yingxue Sun, and Wen Ren, The Private Art Museum Report, eds. Larry's List and AMMA (Vienna: Modern Arts Publishing, 2016), 6: "The impressive appearance of these museums, in combination with their wide-ranging activities, certainly impacts a museum founder's visibility in the art world. Conversely, often the private museum's authority is supported by the collector's own status owing to their celebrity circles, their ranking on a wealth list, or by their standing as owner or founder of a widely known brand, enterprise, or family business". Online edition: https://www.larryslist.com/report/Private%20Art%20Museum%20Report.pdf. Accessed 18 December 2018.

> than aspiring to sustainability, is characterized by short-term horizons and short-term resources, specialization and fads.[54]

Cynics might go a step further and say that private museums have become marketplaces rather than museums. They are spaces in which collectors display their acquisitions, give the works "museum endorsement", and thereby establish the works' market value for later onward sale. A familiar precedent is Charles Saatchi's opening of the Saatchi gallery in 1985, his collection and exhibition of Young British Art ("YBA") in the 1990s, his partnership with London's Royal Academy of Arts for the "Sensation" exhibition in 1997 and – most importantly – the sale of his YBA collection in the years that followed. While Saatchi undoubtedly generated income for that particular generation of British artists, he also profited from the combined forces of public and private museum institutions for the purpose of creating a market for those works.[55] Focusing on a more recent example, Dora Imhof notes that two of the most highly publicized exhibitions at the 2017 Venice Biennale were the privately funded exhibition spaces of the Fondazione Prada and the Palazzo Grassi/Punta della Dogana sites owned by François Pinault. Many of the works produced by Damien Hirst (*The Wreck of the Unbelievable*) for display in Pinault's buildings were produced in editions that were sold during the show, drawing the exhibition space close to that of a salesroom.

For artists, this conflation of public and private is a mixed blessing. Becoming part of a privately funded museum collection is not a guarantee of long-term public accessibility or of participation in an enduring narrative of art history. Instead, works can drift into and out of a private museum, be used to promote a collector's personal agenda, and then be dispensed from both. It is important, therefore, that the funding models and acquisition and deaccessioning policies of private institutions be made clear to artists and their publics. Creating a foundation in perpetuity has very different implications from the establishment of a limited-life foundation both in terms of the opportunities made available by the trust and the duration of the values of the founder. It also has implications for art history. Art critic Robert Storr was one of the first commentators to voice concerns about the rise of private museums. Writing in 2008, he stated: "The social excuse is that the general audience will see more [art] in more places, but it won't; it will merely see what a proud possessor of a finite slice of visual culture wants them to see".[56] Returning to the point about the development of early twentieth-century capitalism described by Keynes and Galbraith that I discussed above, the founding of private museums appeals to the rhetoric of social obligation that sustained the accumulation of capital early in the twentieth century and that induced publics not to object to the rise to power of wealthy classes. Yet, the "double bluff" explored by both Keynes and Galbraith has developed into

54 Chris Dercon, Why Bother? Or the Rise of the Private Museum, in Art Centre Basel, Katharina Beisiegel, eds., *New Museums* (Munich: Hirmer, 2017), 172.

55 For further discussion see Thompson, *The Orange Balloon Dog*, 144.

56 Robert Storr, The Art of Giving: When Patrons Wrestle Power from Museum Curators and Directors, What Does it Mean for the Public?, in *Frieze*, 6 May 2008, Issue 15: https://frieze.com/article/art-giving, Accessed 2 January 2019.

a "triple bluff": the founders of private museums enjoy tax breaks, exert control over their art assets and/or institutions that house them, and enjoy cultural influence while purporting to fulfil a social good in a disinterested way.

Soichiro Fukutake, founder of the Benesse Art Site in Naoshima, Japan, has commented that he finds it "hard to believe that there may be criticism directed at the increasing number of private museums".[57] It must be acknowledged that good things can flow from privately funded art institutions: the renovation and repurposing of disused heritage buildings; the commissioning of new architecture; employment for those involved in the set-up and operation of new businesses; opportunities for artists; public access to privately owned works; and enhancements to the cultural life of particular cities or regions. It is also worth recalling that the legal structures, mission statements, and social contexts of private museums do not conform to a single model. In consequence, these institutions cannot be examined and/or critiqued according to values and standards that fall under a unitary rubric.

From the perspective of art history, however, this article has set out to explore concerns that the social meaning of art and its histories (past and future) are increasingly determined by a restricted group of agents whose institutions often lack transparency and public accountability. The extension of influence from the realm of private taste to that of public institution is a hallmark of the contemporary artworld and its philanthropic structures, including the founding of private museums. Taken together, these developments risk the creation of an art history from above, where the financial power of a circumscribed demographic translates into the promotion of specific intellectual, social, and aesthetic values for uncertain periods of time.

The market has its own logic that is driven by fluctuating ideas of quality, taste, and fashion. It is clear that public museums have often been influenced by the market and, indeed, by the personal preferences of their own directors and curators. Recent years have, however, seen certain public institutions (in combination with artists' input and academic scholarship) act as an important corrective to the market, to familiar canons, and to legacies of private taste. The traditional history of European modernism is a case in point – a narrative that until comparatively recently has focused on the creativity of a restricted group of male artists. Some large, public museums are confronting the histories of their own collections and displays in ways that challenge such biased art historical narratives: MoMA has recently given increasing predominance to the contribution of women to American and European modernism; following pressure from the Guerrilla Girls and the Advancing Women Artists Foundation, the Uffizi has pledged to show more works by female artists; and London's National Gallery is actively acquiring works by women to redress gender imbalance in its collection.[58] Such examples are a long way

57 Bechtler and Imhof, *The Private Museum of the Future*, 62.

58 See Birgit Katz, Uffizi Is Giving Women Artists a More Prominent Space on its Walls, Smithsonian.com, 6 February 2017. https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonianmag/uffizi-is-giving-women-artists-prominent-space-180962047/. Accessed 18 December 2018. Jonathan Jones, National Gallery buys Artemisia

from creating a public museum industry that is representative of the wide range of people who make up contemporary artworlds or who have contributed to the histories of art, but it does signal an awareness of the existence of a duty of care to the diverse communities with whom public institutions engage.

The situation is, however, different in the case of private museums and the ways in which market interests extend into control of the arts more generally. Being aware of the assertion of private taste in a public setting and its impact on other voices – whether those of artists, of curators, or of art audiences – is crucial to the development of contemporary museum culture. Artists and publics need to understand the acquisition and deaccessioning policies of art institutions, the ownership and projected future of privately funded museums, and the long-term plans for collections. It is only by expanding – rather than reducing – the range of participants in conversations about public and private collecting and supporting the independence of public institutions that an innovative and diverse artworld may be secured into and beyond the twenty-first century.

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