

**Painting the Nation:
Examining the Intersection Between Politics and
the Visual Arts Market in Emerging Economies.**

Introduction

Why Art Matters

Definitions of art range from a “mirror held up to reflect nature” in its purest of forms (in Shakespearean terms) to a forceful “hammer” that shapes and molds society (according to Marxist theorist Leon Trotsky). Our paper draws on these vivid analogies to illustrate the importance of macro-level factors on industry and society by using the visual arts as a “mirror” and examining its role as a “hammer” in terms of the socio-political and cultural environment in which it is produced, distributed and consumed. By focusing on the art scenes of two Socialist, emerging economies, we highlight the tensions inherent within these markets, revealing a very palpable interdependency between the macro-environment and the world of art. Our findings highlight the impact that political ideology has upon everyday marketing, production and consumption practices (in line with previous studies such as Kravets 2012 and Zhao and Belk 2008) and the utility of looking to the arts to understand wider issues in the study of marketing.

Most research on the art market assumes that art is driven by artists’ creative output although some of the more sociological literature acknowledges the institutional frameworks (or artworlds) that contextualize the work and the need for artists to operate within them (Bain 2005; Baumann 2007; Becker 1982; Bradshaw, McDonagh and Marshall 2006; Danto 1964; Holbrook and Bradshaw 2007; Robertson, 2005; Robertson and Chong 2008; Rodner and Thomson 2013). Little attention has been paid to the wider macro-level socio-cultural and political, ideological pressures that affect artists’ careers and the work they produce as argued for by academics such

as Beech (2010) and Day, Edwards and Mabb (2010). Indeed Pollock (1980, p. 57) laments that art history has produced an “ideologically pure space for art” where production, class, ideology, and social relations are ignored. Our study provides a discussion of how such institutional structures within a Socialist context shape the development of the art market and the art produced within it and how, due to the ideological discrepancy with the international art market’s capitalist structure, these structures become more evident. We thus respond to Dholakia’s (2012 p. 221) call for an understanding of macro-level studies investigating “ideologies, obfuscations, manipulations and mystifications playing out in markets” for a more critical, holistic perspective in marketing. We find that artists struggle to establish themselves when there are competing discourses in operation in the macro-context in which they must create and disseminate their work. In short, they find themselves caught in the middle.

Our chosen cases, namely the Venezuelan and Chinese contemporary art scenes, allow us to consider how macro-environmental factors can hinder the emergence of markets on a global level, drawing attention to the cultural hegemonies implicit within market structures. Eisenhardt (1989) suggests the use of cross-case comparison, highlighting the similarities and differences between several cases, as a way of avoiding “premature and even false conclusions” from the single case format (1989, p. 540; see also Stake 2006). Ultimately, this comparative method can lead the researcher to develop a more “sophisticated understanding” of the data, “novel findings,” and more “accurate and reliable theory” (Eisenhardt 1989, p. 541). Furthermore, sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt notes how the comparative method provides a “focus on cross-societal, institutional, or macrosocietal aspects of societies and social analysis” (cited in Lijphart 1971, p. 682).

Although we may perceive these contexts as poles apart, our chosen cases share complex socio-political circumstances that currently thwart the development of their respective local art scenes, making them ideal cross-national settings in which to explore the dynamics of macro-level forces on the art market. As a means of avoiding a whole-nation bias as argued by Lijphart (1975), our comparative analysis of two emerging markets with distinctly Socialist regimes allows us to draw richer and more transferable conclusions on the production, dissemination, and consumption processes for the contemporary arts. We find that in order to achieve a sustainable and successful image (or brand identity) for their work, contemporary artists in these countries must learn to negotiate between *official* and *non-official* art scenes. This comparative study demonstrates that it is impossible to consider the workings of the art market without taking into consideration the macro-level context in which it operates, both nationally and internationally. Therefore, our macro-societal findings expose the structures within which artists must build their careers. These are presented as ideologically neutral, but we show that they construct their own cultural hegemonies, illustrating the political systems operating them. As such, this research contributes to the wider macromarketing literature in considering how marketing activities and practices must adapt to (or circumnavigate) the governing institutional system in place. If they wish to be legitimized, artists cannot ignore the political systems within which they operate.

Spheres of Branding

Our research uncovers the process through which brand-building occurs in these two chosen art markets and finds that there are three key, interconnected levels that artists must operate within and engage with in order to become successful: their individual practice (artist branding) in terms of the work they want to produce; the art world (cultural branding) which operates based

on the legitimization structures of the international art market; and government policy (nation branding).

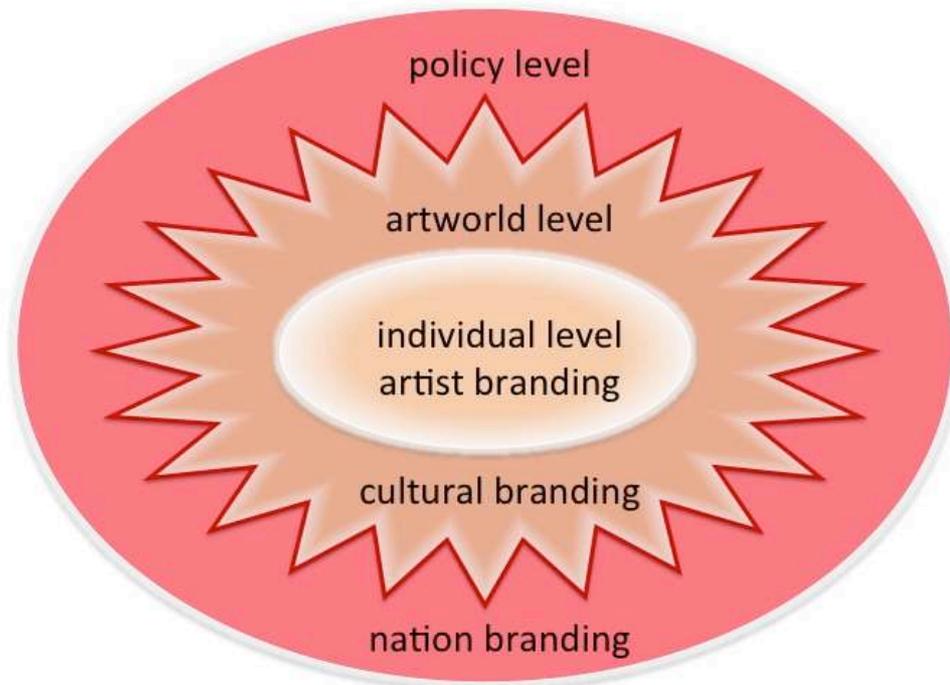


Figure 1. Spheres of branding

In this diagram we illustrate three distinct spheres of branding within the art market. At the core we find the artistic discourse, where a individualized branding of the artist as creative being takes place; secondly the wider sphere of cultural branding is developed by members of the art world who actively interpret and disseminate the work of the artist to a wider consumer public; and lastly the nation branding goes hand in hand with cultural policies and the image the host country wishes to portray. Our diagram demonstrates how national discourses that essentially work against the individualized branding rhetoric of the visual artist jeopardize the healthy development of the country's cultural sector, thereby hindering the possibility of branding local artists on the global art panorama.

Through our three-tiered branding analysis, we explore the cross-societal issues of:

- 1) the image that these nations build for their contemporary artists and how this feeds into wider ideological discourses;

- 2) the barriers that artists may face in creating a brand narrative for themselves; and
- 3) how a state brand narrative and art world brand narrative should ideally come together to create a sustainable art market.

To consider these issues, we must explore the tensions between political ideologies and art market practice, between the individual creative identity of the visual artist and the collective identity of a national cultural brand, and between local and global art systems. From our findings we uncover a profound tension between these branding spheres, which prevents the ultimate attainment of cultural legitimacy, a tension that we visualize in our three-tier diagram (Figure 1). It shows the various branding levels inherent in the art world, but also highlights how a seemingly hostile and culturally misguided national brand will in fact hinder the local art field's cultural dissemination of the contemporary artists working within this system. This clash between the artistic discourse and an inhospitable macro-environment for contemporary art means that artists face significant barriers. We shall explore these barriers in two distinct venues of public support for the arts, which are both directly funded and managed by government officials and have international significance: national representation at the Venice Biennale and local dissemination within the museum framework.

Setting the Context

Before discussing the art market and its valuation systems we find it useful to first examine some of the various conceptualizations of art to unpack their hidden ideological perspectives. We then turn to an examination of how branding can be a useful lens to consider how these socio-cultural and political discourses are packaged and disseminated, framing what is and is not art-worthy.

Conceptualizations of Art

The concept of art has continually been in flux. To situate our research within this concept, the following overview briefly considers some key social, aesthetic, and economic theories on art, providing us with a working definition for our analysis. Gombrich (1995) presents the history of art as a comprehensive appreciation of all expressions of visual art, examining only what appears within the four corners of the frame, without reference to a historical, social or biographical context. We find this approach limiting as artists operate within political systems and structures that act to either reject or uphold their work. We therefore take a more sociological approach to the subject that defines art as something through which society expresses itself and emphasizes the historical, social, and biographical factors seen to contribute to how art is perceived by the viewer. In this sense, Schroeder (2010) understands art to be the “foundation for understanding the complex interconnections between society, economics, and culture” (p. 18).

Defining what is and is not art seems to go hand in hand with defining the purpose, if any, of art. Artist-photographer Man Ray’s summary expresses the historical “usefulness” of art: “throughout time painting has alternately been put to the service of the church, the state, arms, individual patronage, nature appreciation, scientific phenomena, anecdote and decoration” (cited in Harrison and Wood 2003, p. 277). This utilitarian view of art values its contribution to social and spiritual well-being, encouraging morality. Carrying art’s usefulness to an extreme, early Communist Russia used artworks (often public monuments and murals or propaganda posters) as an indoctrination tool. Leon Trotsky envisioned art as a weapon, not “a mirror, but a hammer: it does not reflect, it shapes” (cited in Harrison and Wood 2003, p. 443).

At the opposite end, French philosopher Victor Cousin is credited with developing the foundations of the doctrine of art for art’s sake, promoting the belief that art must remain

independent from utilitarian, religious, or political purposes. More recently, Hirschman (1983) agrees that aesthetic creativity is expressed or experienced for its own sake and that the artist is essentially motivated by the need to achieve self-fulfillment via the creative process. In their economic approach to the issue of supply and demand in art and culture, Heilbrun and Grey (2001) find that the arts go against the laws of consumer sovereignty, meaning that art is not produced in response to economic incentives or audience demands. These concepts derive largely from the Romantic concept of art as the result of a uniquely gifted, creative individual expression, still the basis of valuation in the international art market (Pollock 1980). As a result, the macro-context in which the work is created, such as the ideological or political dimensions, is rarely acknowledged.

While Becker (1982) sees creativity as the key feature that distinguishes art, he acknowledges some of these macro-contexts by asserting that art history fails to give enough importance to the networks of cooperation that exist within the art world to create and consume and attribute value to the works produced. Moving away from the artist's creative genius as central to an artwork's value, Becker offers a sociological definition of art worlds as being "the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things," (Becker 1982, p. x). These networks are complex and fluid and therefore often hidden or forgotten in discussions of artists' success, but are nevertheless essential as they form the context in which valuation occurs.

Danto (1964) goes some way to explain this sociological art world by suggesting that what is considered to have the status of art is socially constituted and defined and, therefore, legitimation in the art market is normative. It is thus necessary to understand how legitimacy is achieved, how it is denied, how it changes, how it is lost or regained in order to analyze how a

work of art achieves, or more accurately, is conferred value. Hegemony, domination, control and manipulation are all features of the politics of art, no less than critical, aesthetic and theoretical determinations of value and innovation. Danto concludes that something commonplace may acquire art-status simply because it occupies a place within an art-specific context, wherein art criticism, theory, and history validate the work of the artist. An artwork outside this art world (a gallery, the artist's studio, a prestigious collection or museum) is little more than the combination of materials used by the artist (Danto 1964). Danto's art world therefore underpins the current art market in terms of the process artworks must go through to be considered art worthy.

More recent research integrates art firmly within the business context. In the art market, worth is ultimately dependent on the sales price. Even if the artist's original intentions during the creative process may not have been commercial, the work becomes a traded good once it is brought to the market place (Fillis 2006). Grampp (1989, p. 8) argues that "works of art are economic goods, whose value can be measured by the market." The social and economic implications of the marketing and sale of art are therefore crucial to an understanding of the art market as it currently stands. However, they are not sufficient. While art may indeed be a luxury product (Veblen 1899), as a cultural artifact it is also more than that. The "truth-value" of a piece of jewelry, for example, is rarely questioned.

A more comprehensive approach to the definition of art allows us to explore relations between art and the various dimensions that surround it: business, political, sociological, and cultural. In his "Statement" from the 1960s, Haacke asserts that "no 'artists' [...] are immune to being affected and influenced by the socio-political value system of the society in which they live and of which all cultural agencies are a part, no matter if they are ignorant of these

constraints or not” (cited in Harrison and Wood 1992, p. 905). Artists, therefore, no matter what “ideological coloration” they may have, become “unwitting partners in the art-syndrome” as they participate “jointly in the maintenance and/or development of the ideological make-up of their society. They work within that frame, set the frame and are being framed” (Haacke cited in Harrison and Wood 1992, p. 905).

Our analysis acknowledges these various divergent discourses that have contextualized and shaped art movements and artists over time. Nevertheless, the frameworks of the contemporary visual arts market for the two chosen emerging economies are the focus of this research. While we acknowledge Becker and Danto’s macro-perspective of a sociologically constituted art world in that we take an overview of the structural systems in place in the art market that artists have to operate within, we must also accept that ultimately the art market operates in hierarchical and often elitist structures that can be manipulated due to the market’s commercial underpinnings (see Joy and Sherry 2003 for a comprehensive overview of these structures). We agree with Beech’s argument that “politics and art are fully intertwined” (2010, p. 391) and therefore art not only represents politics but also *performs* politics, in that we need to consider not only the work itself but also how it is framed and the social relations it reproduces – which art is accepted, acknowledged, encouraged, censored, forbidden. Therefore our approach exposes the framework within which artists operate to have their work valued on the market. Through our three-tiered branding lens, we show how the artistic discourse (individual branding) and the legitimation of the art world (cultural branding) may be hampered if broader nation branding (through government policies) works against the very nature of these core spheres of creativity, thereby impeding a successful and sustainable dissemination of the visual arts on

local and international market structures. To undertake this analysis, we adopt a socio-cultural branding approach.

Branding the Arts

By applying a socio-cultural branding lens (Holt 2004; Kelly 2010) to the visual arts market, we are able to capture a more holistic understanding of the way in which value is generated in the market. Value encompasses the work itself, the artist's reputation and career, the image portrayed by the media, and endorsements from key stakeholders, such as dealers, curators and collectors (Kerrigan et al. 2011; Rodner and Thomson 2013; Schroeder 2005). That the most successful artists on the international art market are branded is evidenced by the art market's valuation processes, with brand names (i.e. a Picasso, a Warhol, a Hirst) and their associated brand images (career and style narratives), instantly attracting more attention and higher prices. For example, Hewer, Brownlie, and Kerrigan (2013) explore the creation of brand Warhol during his factory years, and Muñiz, Norris and Fine (2014) discuss how Pablo Picasso managed his brand. By identifying themselves as a desirable brand, artists, adopting a marketing approach, can build their reputation and symbolic capital (Fillis 2004). For Bourdieu this symbolic capital translates to "a degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration or honor ... founded on knowledge ... and recognition" (1993, p. 7). Today, an artist's reputation and symbolic capital, if managed effectively, can and will be translated into economic capital, financial success, and a sustainable career. Velthuis (2005) analyses such value creation in the art market and Rodner and Kerrigan's (2014) show how symbolic value can be translated into economic worth. In a market where valuation lies in the hands of a few experts and remains based on uncertain and

changing criteria (Thornton 2009), brands serve to provide consumers an assurance of quality and provenance.

In order to become branded on the international art market however, artists must first attract credibility and social capital in the art world through sustained visibility first locally, then nationally, and eventually internationally. As illustrated in Figure 1, the branding process occurs in three spheres: individually at the artistic level, collectively at the cultural level of the art world, and nationally through government policy. As a multifarious construct, branding in the arts does not always run seamlessly, as these levels may not always be in sync with one another. Moreover, the art market is by no means a level playing field. Artists operating beyond the world's key art hubs find themselves at an instant disadvantage in terms of achieving global visibility (While 2003). Nevertheless, although satellite art markets may lack the clout of the renowned cultural hubs, they too will foster interconnectivity between creative individuals in the pursuit of dissemination and approval of the work of art from a broader consumer audience (Currid 2007). On these satellite art markets, Robertson notices how many tend to import "Western codes of art market practice" (2011, p. 43), mirroring the global art mechanism at home, and participating, whenever possible, in established art echelons. Consequently, some emerging nations may fear a "Westoxication" of their local market, aiming instead for a cultural protectionist approach to their creative industries and thereby becoming more culturally independent of the international art market. However, Robertson warns these emerging nations of veering too far from an established Western model of art practice, or denying its artists any sort of participation in the global mechanism of arts validation. We demonstrate that self-inflicted isolation hinders the possibility of positioning contemporary artists on the global art scene and may also jeopardize the image of the nation brand in the arts and beyond. While this

discourse is extremely problematic, the fact of the matter is that for artists to have access to the higher end of the international art market it is necessary to operate within these Western institutional structures.

With little research on non-Western contexts, we need to consider how the structure of the international visual arts market influences national production and consumption and vice versa and examine the barriers that artists currently face when working outside of the Western system. Cultural policies actively influence the broader national image of the chosen emerging markets through the support and dissemination of their local art worlds. Yet, if tainted too heavily by political ideologies, this support may divert significantly from the established global art market structure and jeopardize the positioning of local artists as international references for art. In order to achieve cultural prestige, these local art worlds require hospitable macro-environments (the outer level of Figure 1), where government policies openly collaborate with the art market structure in the meaning-making process of legitimizing artists and their products.

We therefore consider branding to be a valuable tool of analysis as it reflects certain socio-cultural and political discourses while overshadowing others, as demonstrated in Kravets' (2012) examination of the politics of vodka branding in Russia; in Kerrigan, Shivanandan and Hede's (2012) work on imagined ideas of the nation vis-à-vis the branding of Incredible India; in Cooke's (2014) examination of a modernized tribal branding for the Arabian Gulf nation-states via government funded heritage projects, and in Dong and Tian's (2009) analysis of the use of Western brands to assert Chinese national identity. The branding discourse allows us to look at the different levels artists must operate within in order to become branded on the international art market, how these brands are used (and sometimes abused) by the state to reflect and promote certain ideological perspectives, and how these are then mediated on the international market.

Rather than merely *selling* a nation to a global audience, an international artistic presence aims to *represent* a nation on the cultural horizon, a rather more complex undertaking. By adopting this branding lens, we are able to uncover the tensions between the international art market and emerging national art markets and the ways in which individual artists try to negotiate between the two by branding themselves on the cultural panorama.

Methodology

By adopting a Constructivist approach to research, where social realities (such as value, reputation and demand for art) are constructed in the minds of individuals and groups (Guba 1990), we were able to examine art legitimization and branding mechanisms in the two chosen emerging economies. We utilized semi-structured qualitative interviews and participant observation as a means of deconstructing the world of our subjects while at the same time exploring the complexities of the local art market. Key participants included artists, commercial galleries, dealers, critics, curators, and foundations, thus penetrating the individual artistic sphere as well as the cultural sphere of the art world. We drew upon a wide variety of secondary sources including auction data, press reviews, art criticism, historical data, policy documents and news reports to frame the socio-political environment and institutional structures at play in the national sphere. These contextual and historical examples allowed us to consider the macro-environmental factors that impact on the branding process.

This study includes 48 semi-structured individual interviews with Venezuelan and Chinese artists and art professionals. Table 1 provides information on the professional makeup of our respondents and what roles they play within their local art markets. To complement the original material used throughout this paper, in Table 2 (see Discussion and Conclusion section)

we provide exemplary material from our primary data that helps categorize our themes, strengthen our findings, and honor our participants' voices. The majority of interviews for Venezuelan participants were conducted in Caracas, the nation's cultural, financial and political center. Some additional interviews were carried out at art events in Europe, including the Venice Biennale, Christie's (London), an artist's studio in Paris, and an art fair in London. Interviews in China were carried out in the key centers of the art market: Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong. Hong Kong was chosen due to its role as the financial center of the emerging Chinese art market, Beijing as the political and cultural capital, and Shanghai because it is a key business hub that hosts significant art fairs and biennials. Interviewees were selected to ensure that participants had achieved a high level of national or international prominence on the art market and/or at globally renowned art events.

Table1. Participants of the Study

INTERVIEWEE (pseudonym)	PROFESSION	LOCATION
María	Public curator	Venice Biennale
Bernice	Artist	Venice Biennale
David	Artist	Venice Biennale
Alana	Dealer / art restorer	Venezuela
Rigoberto	Art critic / art educator	Venezuela
Carolina	Public curator	Venezuela
Fernanda	Public curator / art historian / critic	Venezuela
Mauricio	Curator / art critic / dealer	Venezuela
Jorge	Art critic / private curator	Venezuela
Felipe	Curator / art educator	Venezuela
Isaac	Artist / art restorer	Venezuela

Gustavo	Art critic / curator	Venezuela
Bianca	Art critic	Venezuela
Elisabeth	Dealer	Venezuela
Leopoldo	Dealer / public curator	Venezuela
Paloma	Museum professional / art restorer	Venezuela
Nelson	Artist / art restorer	Venezuela
Carmelo	Artist / art restorer	Venezuela
Tamara	Private curator	Venezuela
Jacobo	Artist	Venezuela
Armando	Curator / critic / historian	Venezuela
Amelia	Dealer	Venezuela
Roberto	Artist	Venezuela
Amapola	Dealer / gallerista	Venezuela
Fermin	Art educator / public curator	Venezuela
Linda	Dealer	Venezuela
Rocio	Private curator	Venezuela
Nicolas	Dealer / founder and manager of art fair	Elicited Text (Venezuelan participant)
Mafalda	Artist manager	Paris (Venezuelan participant)
Humberto	Dealer / gallerista	London (Venezuelan participant)
Dan	Auction house specialist	London
Bruce	Artist	China
Stephen	Artist / public curator	China
Peter	Artist	China
Leo	Artist	China
Pacey	Artist	China
Kai	Artist	China

Oliver	Artist	China
Milo	Artist	China
Iris	Artist / private curator	China
Emilia	Dealer	China
Louise	Dealer	China
Amanda	Dealer	China
Victor	Dealer	China
April	Dealer	China
Amy	Public curator / critic	China
Anthony	Consultant / critic / collector	China
Debbie	Auction house specialist	China

Openness and flexibility were key features in the data collection for this study as participants actively shaped and enhanced the sampling process. By adopting an ethnographic approach to data collection, we used a snowballing technique to gain access to a tight network of art professionals and institutions within the two chosen emerging markets. Alongside this need for openness and flexibility, given the cultural and historical context of the chosen emerging markets, this study demanded a high level of sensitivity as it soon became obvious that our participants could not reflect on their local art scenes without making reference to their particular socio-political circumstances. Due to the sensitive nature of these topics, informants have been anonymized.

The Study

As we have discussed, using the arts as a tool for the political dissemination of ideas has a long history and art, as a symbolic object, holds socio-cultural and political meaning. Both of our cases demonstrate the hidden ideological context in which exposing the discourses used to package and disseminate it legitimizes an artwork. This is revealed in the clash between what is deemed official and unofficial, so that to become legitimized in these nations, artists cannot escape the political. Therefore in line with Joy and Sherry (2004) we find that operating within the institutional framework of the art market is a political act in itself as certain discourses and styles are promoted as official whereas others are branded unofficial. Our data therefore shows polarized art worlds with two discourses at play.

In China, since the opening up of the market in the late 1980s, the official art promoted by the government has been less commercially successful on the international art market than the unofficial. What has been picked up by the West (Preece 2014) has been framed as part of a narrative of liberation in which avant-garde artists can be presented as having broken free from the political mainstream of official art production, that is, propaganda. Of course, this in itself is a political act and although most of the artists interviewed purposefully avoided political themes in their work, they felt frustration at their work being politicized nonetheless based on what one artist called the “Chineseness” of it [Milo]. So while, as we will show, the official work branded and promoted by the Chinese government presents an ideal based on a collective imaginary, the unofficial work legitimized by the international market presents an equally invented brand image, although using a different frame of reference. In both cases the artists are restricted by the institutional definitions of what is considered valuable within these conflicting systems.

In Venezuela too, since the arrival of the Chávez administration in 1999, the art field has been trapped between the Governmental discourse and that of the established cultural sector.

Local curator Maria laments how “we are currently in a country that has two rivaling positions: one is the Government and the other is the Opposition, which permeates into the cultural field in a very dramatic and alienating manner.” Artists selected to represent the nation at, say, a biennial may be tainted by a negative image or pigeonholed from the outset as being staunch Chávez supporters, which could unfairly translate into poor dissemination and validation by the commercial end of the art market according to Armando.

The branding of artists and their artworks is therefore a contested area. We untangle this tension between international and state-level political visions for the art market and explore how these conflicting discourses are constructed and used. Our data reveal various ideological frameworks in which artists must maneuver, as branding levels currently operate at cross-purposes with one another (see Figure 1). Although the chosen nations operate in vastly different contexts, we find that they do share macro-economic, political, and socio-cultural circumstances that have hindered the marketability of their art scene. Shortsighted government programming and misguided cultural policies have led to a fragile art sector in both nations.

Using the Arts to Paint the Nation

Despite adopting creative, culture industry rhetoric, such as that espoused by Caves (2000) and Florida (2002), both nations fail to develop sustainable and reputable art worlds. Given the criticism these policies have since attracted (Hoyman and Faricy 2009; Malanga 2004), finding little theoretical support for the connection between a creative class and economic development and suggesting that the examples used are based on speculative bubbles, perhaps this is not surprising. Our respondents held the view that public funds are wasted on short-term or ill-considered projects that appear to have little resonance at home or abroad, making local artists

increasingly frustrated and having to find alternative distribution strategies. In both cases however, the cultural policies specifically aim to use art as political and social propaganda, controlling what can and cannot be exhibited.

State-level support for the arts, ideally detached from the (art) market structure, is generally characterized by national museum acceptance or national representation at an international art event, such as participating at the national pavilion at the Venice Biennale. However, this public funding *will* in fact directly affect the market value of the artist and their work by providing the “highest kind of institutional approval available” (Becker 1982, p. 117). As the “idealized repository” and sign of the “highest aesthetic value” (Chong 2010, p. 19; see also Chong 2008; Goodwin 2008), the museum, in Bourdieu’s terms, confers symbolic capital to the (brand) name of the artist and their work, which translates into a concurrent rise in price for the artwork. This level of state support therefore plays a key role in the value-generating mechanism of the arts scene by helping build a reputation and subsequently a market for the artist and their work (Rodner and Thomson 2013). Our study focuses on the impact of the political context on national cultural policy with specific reference to these pinnacles of the art market, the Venice Biennale and the national museum framework, to study how and which art is legitimized, the discourses used to do so, how this is perceived by the international art market, and how it affects local artists.

Nation Branding at the Venice Biennale

The Venice Biennale is taken as an example here in order to examine what type of art is deemed official and is used as an ideological representation to boost these countries’ soft power (Nye 2004). With several levels of participation, including independent curatorship and an awards

system within the *Palazzo*, Venice becomes a platform for selected artists to be cultural ambassadors of their home-grown art scene on the global panorama (Rodner, Omar, and Thomson 2011). Art shown on this international scale means that “politics becomes significant” (Joy and Sherry 2003, p. 168). Described by Adam (2009, p. 1) as the “grand-daddy of art fests,” the Venice Biennale confers a seal of approval on the artists who participate, branding them (and their nation) on the international art market. For example, Hong Kong dealer Louise discusses how after “the youngest artist in the gallery was selected for a show at Venice, I’ve now sold almost every single work she’s ever made and they’ve mostly gone to major collections,” while Venezuelan participating artist David explains how the event helps artists as individual creators to “strengthen and contextualize their artistic discourse” as their signature work is set against the backdrop of the global art panorama.

Despite being rubber-stamped as participating at the Biennale, cultural legitimacy of the event depends on various factors. Previous Biennale director, Francesco Bonami maintains that quality is key: “there’s an illusion that the Biennale can help an artist’s career but it all comes down to the quality of the work” (Adam 2009, p. 2). The quality of the artistic discourse is key and should ideally stand out from the crowd of the populous international event. In both our examples we witness how the individualized artistic discourse can become subsumed by a collective and politically tainted national discourse, or in extreme cases, censored by the Ministry of Culture. Coupled with an idealized national image, this tailored cultural discourse fails to successfully legitimize the individual brand of the artist.

Since its first representation at Venice in 2005, China has been careful to show relatively conservative work, tending to portray traditional subject matters, focusing more on the “soft politics than the art itself” [Bruce]. If we take the 2011 exhibition as an example, China’s

nationalist presence was visible in terms of a traditional theme based on Chinese fragrances (tea and herbal medicines). An even more expressly nationalist presence was found in the show “Cracked Culture? / The Quest for Identity in Contemporary Chinese Art,” organized by the Guangdong Museum of Art as a collateral event for Venice. The work was in the Realist style preferred by the Chinese government and presented a monocultural perspective on Chinese identity that Western critics argued came across as “self-defeating” (Vine 2011) as it served to highlight the naivety of presenting such an image as a reality. Interestingly, this is similar to what Finnane (2005, p. 587) found in the high-fashion context, whereby “predictable pastiches of Chinese culture” prevent success on the world stage. Indeed, we argue that an artistic national identity can only ever be imaginary as it hides the complexity of political, socio-economic and personal forces that affect the production of art.

Moreover, this type of art is at odds with the unofficial work which has been so successful on the market, namely Political Pop and Cynical Realism which was, as described by Preece (2014), marketed and promoted outside of China by the West and celebrated for its ironic take on Chinese socio-political issues. It is interesting to note that while this type of art was forced underground within China due to its ideologically critical content; in the early 2000’s officials (in line with other economic liberalization policies), realizing the economic success of the art on the market, permitted its dissemination and promotion. However, the fact that this work is still not officially allowed to represent China at events such as the Biennale shows the conflicted approach the government has to this art, which although legitimized internationally, still sits uncomfortably with Chinese officials. We can thus see, once again, the divide between the official and nonofficial representing radically different styles and ideologies. The nationalist perspective selected was particularly discomfiting in the 2011 event due to the fact that that at

the time the Biennale opened, China's most internationally famous contemporary artist, Ai Weiwei was still imprisoned and his fate unknown. This illustrates the complexity of the discourses that surround artworks, as they can be tainted or ennobled based on the context in which they are shown.



Figure 2. Ai Wei Wei at Venice

One of the many posters asking to 'Free Weiwei' posted across Venice during the 2011 Biennale in direct opposition to the 'official' party-line presented at the Chinese Pavilion. Source:

www.flickr.com/photos/47149521@N02/6337199428/in/photolist-aDZNBh-azUfFn. Photo taken by Flats! On November 12, 2011.

While the state's role in dictating what can and cannot be produced has been significantly loosened in the past decade, it is still present. Our data showed that censorship is still a permanent fear and artists must either self-censor themselves or face the consequences and great personal expense incurred by Ai Weiwei. The very fact that Ai is by far the most famous of contemporary Chinese artists in the West, and has consistently been in the top 15 of *ArtReview's* Power 100 ranking of the most powerful figures of the contemporary art world, being named *the* most powerful artist after his release in June 2011 (BBC 2011), demonstrates just how at odds

the two (international and national) art systems are. Furthermore, cultural policies remain unclear and fluid. The artists interviewed complained of finding themselves in a constant state of ambiguity, never knowing whether their work will be acceptable or not as what is deemed official and non-official is in constant flux. Proof of this inconsistency in policy is found in the fact that despite the event being sanctioned and organized by the Cultural Ministry, Beijing's cyber police blocked the Biennale's website across China.

Amy, a curator who was part of the selection panel for the 2011 Biennale's Golden Lion award, reflected that the Chinese pavilion was "frustrating" in that it focused on a political discourse, as she witnessed "a simple projection of power" in the show. In this case, soft power tactics are superseded by a blatant utilitarian approach to the arts, where the national brand appears to be at odds with the cultural brand of an art world narrative. Chinese artists find themselves stuck between the two discourses. On the one hand, they will struggle to establish a successful career if they work solely within the state-approved parameters, as the national structures are not sufficiently developed to be sustainable, and, on the other hand, if they create work for the international art market, they risk state punishment if it is considered an act of dissidence.

Unlike China, which needs to scout out its space for the biannual event, Venezuela boasts of a permanent national pavilion since 1956, nestled among the big guns of the art world. Censorship has been less heavy-handed than the Chinese case but nonetheless there are clear examples of political manipulation. For the 50th edition of the Biennale, after one of the two selected artists withdrew from participation due to political disagreements, the remaining participant, Pedro Morales, had his political commentary, digital installation vetoed by the Vice Minister of Culture, as the piece was considered to contain "harmful elements for Venezuela's

international image” (Suazo 2010). The result of this was an empty pavilion on which, in non-official attendance, Morales hung “censored” banners across the building. For the 2009 edition of the event, one artist lamented the polarization of the Venezuelan media. Local coverage of the event back home was restricted on the grounds of alleged political affiliations of the participating artists (Rodner, Omar and Thomson 2011), demonstrating how tensions between official frameworks of cultural dissemination and the media can result in another form of censorship.

Beyond political affiliations, many Venezuelan art professionals regret the increasing tendency towards emphasizing the collective identity through group shows rather than focusing on solo shows of individual artists. These collective shows blur an artist’s signature brand identity for the sake of the group, making the seal of approval bestowed less than effective for the artist and, as a result, the nation. Although previous pavilion curators attest to the individuality of the artist’s signature style on display at the pavilion (Rodner, Omar and Thomson 2011) our respondents lamented a tendency to cram too many artists into this limited space despite its ideal location. In the 2009 edition, for instance, five different artists were on show, alongside the work of a local anthropologist. Gallery owner Humberto argues that collective identity seems to override individual identity: “instead of giving the opportunity to a sole artist to feel something really powerful, important... allowing him to showcase his work internationally.” Quantity over quality seems to impede the career-, reputation-, and brand-building of the artist at the prestigious event. This emphasis on numbers seems to be on the rise as the latest edition of the Biennale (2013) exhibited a group of urban artists who were left anonymous, denying their individual brand to emerge (Fermín 2013a; 2013b).



Figure 3. Collective street art at the Venezuelan pavilion.

Although street art is generally considered a tool for activism, used as a voice for the people against authority, in both Venezuela and China we notice how street art is being co-opted by the government for political ends. In this image, we witness how street art is used at the Venezuelan pavilion in Venice to showcase national and folkloric imagery, including this urban interpretation of Independence War hero Simón Bolívar and the slogan 'Check it out - Bolívar is still current'. Source: Daniel Fermín, *El Universal* (2013b).

This collectivist emphasis goes against the very nature of the art world's branding process, which centers on the artistic trajectory – or the back story as Thompson (2014) refers to it – and branding of the individual genius of the creator, the core element of our Branding Sphere (Figure 1). A similar phenomenon is seen in the Chinese pavilion's preference for group shows. Despite "highly individualized works" on display, the pavilion lacked "cohesion" in curatorial

terms and limited the individual artist's discourse to be explored fully, explains participating artist Bruce. Unfortunately, exhibiting artists will only be efficiently sealed for success at a global level if their own artistic identity is strongly enhanced over and above that of the group or nation that accompanies them.

Alongside this growing tendency towards the group, Venezuelan artists and art professionals have noticed in recent years an "ethnic or somewhat indigenous" [Humberto] feature of national representations at home and abroad, focusing on a "truer" Venezuelan identity. According to Felipe, the attention appears to have shifted from projecting their local artists onto the international scene to promoting an autochthonous identity of the country itself: "the government had set itself this goal of dissemination of a concept of *venezolanidad* (or Venezuelanism) which is very particular." For the 2009 edition, the pavilion included a local anthropologist, Antonio Pérez, who has worked with the Yanomami tribes of the Amazonian jungle. For many, the inclusion of something ethnic seemed to have no clear association with either the event's theme or with the representing artists, but simply testified a government policy to portray an ethnic Venezuelan identity abroad. While this is a commendable initiative, similar to "Chineseness," this representation of an idealized national identity reflects none of the complex identity politics and inequalities at play in these nations.

Although the Biennale was often referred to as "an international springboard," our respondents felt that the national selection committees for national representation simply missed the point, failing to see "how things operate on the international art scene" focusing more on the "glory of the moment" of the selection process [Jorge]. The artists involved are therefore unable to capitalize on the prestige associated with the event because their brand image is diluted and politicized. The problem with these national branding attempts lies in how representation is

handled. Instead of promoting national art on the international level, the final brand image is either confused or an overly simplistic vision of the nation that ignores its contemporary realities. In either case, it does not fit in with the international art market's valuation system, which focuses on individual artists' original worldviews, that is, the first sphere of artistic branding. Our artists find themselves in a catch-22 whereby to access the international market they must build up their reputation at government-funded events, but are thwarted by the current incompatibilities between these two spheres of legitimation. We now turn our attention to how cultural policies at home may also hinder the dissemination of contemporary artists in Venezuela and China.

Bringing Politics into the Museum

Many art theoreticians agree, "when a museum shows and purchases a work, it gives it the highest kind of institutional approval available in the contemporary visual arts world" (Becker 1982, p. 117). This seal of approval comes not only from the institutional clout and permanency of the museum framework, but also from its alleged and desirable distance from the market.

"With the art world almost totally colonized by the markets, museums could become privileged places for escaping the dominance of the market [...] as a privileged place for art works to be presented in a context that allows them to be distinguished from commercial products. Visualized in such a way, the museum would offer spaces for resisting the effects of the growing commercialization of art" (Mouffe 2013, p. 70).

Despite these intentions of purposefully detaching museums from macro-level forces, such as politics and economics and thereby allowing for unbiased dissemination of various artistic discourses, scholars have witnessed how museums have expanded their practices beyond the traditional collecting, exhibiting, and researching of objects. In order to compete with alternative sources of entertainment and education, touring and blockbuster shows now act as sub-brands of the host museum and are used to secure higher audience rates and revenue (Rentschler, Bridson,

and Evans 2014). These authors suggest that museum professionals should “seek to reconcile the internal curatorial needs with the external political and environmental needs” (p. 46), so as to safeguard the reputation, cultural brand and curatorial integrity of the institution. Taken to an extreme, our findings reveal how museums currently operating in the two chosen nations are subjected to an overtly political rhetoric in their curatorial programming, thereby hindering their neutrality as a valid symbolic platform for the cultural field.

In recent years China’s cultural panorama has witnessed a museum-boom and, in 2011 alone, some 390 new museums opened across the country (Cotter 2013). This mushrooming of institutions comes as a consequence of the country’s acceptance that cultural industries are in fact desirable (if not necessary) for the next stage of economic and social development, thanks in part to the success of Chinese contemporary art as an export product (O’Connor and Xin 2006). Along with wider use and referencing of art world design as a marketing strategy to denote luxury and status in the private sector (Joy et al. 2014), governments are also cashing in on the status cultural power can provide them. Biennials and museums are used to promote China’s nation branding in an attempt to showcase the country as both modern and cosmopolitan, but as noted by O’Connor and Xin (2006), this is almost entirely real-estate driven in line with the creative industries rhetoric of Florida (2002), whereby art leads to financial benefits, with a lack of any articulation of a cultural vision for the future.

Most of these museums are primarily historic, reflecting the state’s priorities, as contemporary art tends to be relegated to private museums where more experimental art is allowed, although still subject to some censorship. With the opening of the Shanghai Contemporary Arts Museum in 2012, this is starting to change, but China still has no museum offering anything like a comprehensive historical view of the country’s contemporary art over

the last thirty years. Moreover, avant-garde artists have only appeared in a large group at the National Art Gallery once, during the 1989 China-Avant-Garde exhibition. Coming as it did four months before Tiananmen, the state perceived the exhibition as the first sign of dissent and since then has ruled against unofficial avant-garde art and particularly performance art, which is difficult to control given its ephemeral nature. Similar to national representation at the Biennale, state-run museums tend to showcase conservative work, leaning towards a more Modernist than contemporary curatorial program [Kai]. Similarly, cutting edge contemporary artists in Venezuela struggle to find outlets for their work since “the government has no interest in contemporary art because [they consider it] elitist and that it goes against them” according to gallery owner Amelia.

More worryingly than lacking a suitable contemporary outlet, many of the artists interviewed in China feared that the building boom is running ahead of the country’s ability to run and make sense of these institutions. Peter, for example, suggested that “the *presence* of these institutions is more important to the government than their [art-contextual] *function*.” Scholarships, educational outreach, overarching curatorial perspectives are all found lacking. This is not surprising given that private and commercial galleries were forbidden until 1991 and therefore no formal mechanisms existed for exhibiting, pricing and selling art. Stephen, an established artist and senior figure in local cultural policy, noted how local art professionals and officials were frustrated by the delayed launch of MOCA Shanghai, so that although “more museums are being opened than Starbucks in China” for political and commercial interests; the arts are not fully nurtured. Often, museums do not even get filled or short-term curatorial projects are presented without any follow-up.



Figure 4. China's empty museums.

An example of one of China's 'empty museums' in Ordos, Inner Mongolia, a city considered by many a 'ghost town' intended for 1 million residents, but lying mainly empty (Barboza 2010). The museum's launch was followed by most architectural magazines but is now exhibition- and visitor-less. Source:

www.flickr.com/photos/53933526@N02/10778796596/in/photolist-hqu9GC-hrkXat-hrmdGu-frXTDt-frXTtP-c6xZfo-gBjM8L-gBkmAK-gBkh7z-gBjXs-gBkjXV-gBjjC9-gBknWagBjpcQ-gBjm1j-gBjSNo-gBki5B-gBkofX-gBjMNU-gBjSbG-gBkhAa/. Photo taken by Eric Zhang on November 10, 2013

Preliminary planning is generally lacking in that the physical process of construction takes place before any thought of the bigger picture. During data collection, Stephen was involved in another important cultural project and he despaired at its purpose ever being set out: "there's a lack of focus and endless consultations. No one has the guts to make the decision." He continued by pointing out that:

"In the last 10 years there's been more investment in the arts because of ideas about the creative industries. It could be seen as a curse though as [the government is] spending

money but they don't know what to do with it, they don't have the professionalism to handle it. Bureaucrats have no sense of art. It's good that the government wants to invest but they are overambitious and the issue is who is handling it, it's in the wrong hands."

As a result of institutions being run by civil servants, anything too challenging is censored. Sometimes this is not even due to politics, but because of a lack of artistic competence. With little or no training in the field, bureaucrats lack the cultural capital needed to run the institutions (Bourdieu 1984). There is also concern about the poor follow-up: once built, the museums tend to be forgotten, lacking the ability to build up collections or inaugurate new exhibitions. The practical reality for artists operating within this uncertain policy area is the fragility of their practice and their careers, as tolerance for the artistic discourse shifts randomly. For instance, although Xu Zhen's piece *Rainbow* was condemned by the government for its apparent display of bodily harm, "a mere six months later, the work became part of an international exhibition which was directly sponsored by the Cultural Ministry," explains Stephen. Such erratic cultural policies simply complicate an artist's brand development on the cultural horizon, hindering their position on the local and international art market.

Venezuela has not witnessed a recent museum boom, but rather benefited from a previously established cultural infrastructure, outranking many of its Latin American neighbors. Venezuela's museums framework boasted of some of the best human capital and curatorial programming, giving this institutional network an all-round "dense infrastructure" [Armando] and functioning as a springboard of dissemination for local artists. However, as the nation has become plagued by "radical ideological contempt" [Armando], Venezuela's local cultural panorama has witnessed in recent years a significant restructuring of the museum sector to embrace new political ideologies heralded by the Chávez administration. With this restructuring, museum personnel have departed, but are swiftly replaced with artistically inexperienced staff

that share the government's Socialist political ideology, yet, like their Chinese counterparts, have little understanding of the workings of the art world. As noted above, avant-garde, cutting edge contemporary art forms tend to be considered too risky or experimental and therefore deemed "bourgeois or oligarchic" by the current administration (Khan 2013). Instead, new cultural policies embrace Populist Art, a genre of folkloric and iconic, national imagery. Thus we see once again in both countries a division between the art that is legitimized by the national sphere on political grounds and the art that is legitimized by the cultural sphere on artistic grounds.

Alongside a strong political rhetoric seeping into the museum circuit, in 2005 Venezuela witnessed a restructuring of its entire museum framework through administrative centralization. Former museum director Federica Palomero expressed concern that this administrative centralization added more layers of unnecessary bureaucracy to an already complex structure and belittled the legitimizing role played by art professionals:

"It just multiplies bureaucracy [and] makes people feel even more distant from the decision-making process at the museums. Because there's no one better than the museum staff itself, which knows the collection, the public, the [museum] profile, to decide what is best for the institution" (cited in Méndez 2007).

This fear of an increased bureaucracy seems to stem from an aversion of homogenization for the arts and the institutions that disseminate them. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) note how organizations model themselves on other bodies that they consider to be successful, thereby moving towards a homogenization that may in fact be driven more by a need for efficiency than achieving a competitive edge in the field. Taking an anti-institutional stance, Gielen (2009) asserts that excessive bureaucratization within art institutions essentially goes against the very creative nature of the art scene and has the danger of "letting the metaphorical creative genie out of the bottle" (p. 15). Indeed, Palomero (cited in Méndez 2007) has noticed lower curatorial standards, with extended shows which tend to have a political agenda rather than a cultural one,

lower visitor numbers and confused museum profiles and identities as a result of these changes, similar to what was witnessed in China.

As museums lose their autonomy (by centralizing curatorial programming, budgets and acquisitions), they are also stripped of their established brand identities, transforming them into “simple exhibition halls” with transferrable collections, exhibitions, programs, curatorial profiles and even staff [Felipe]. The art professionals interviewed objected to this loss of institutional identity. Art curator Zavarce argues that museums:

“represent much more than large, neutral and numbing white walls arranged to exhibit and display the whims and caprices of the bureaucracy, or elite in power. A museum, especially in the context of our latitudes, should be a critical project, whose premises should be restricted to the idea of a collection” (Zavarce 2010).

As a result of these blurred institutional identities, artists whose work is shown within them suffer a concomitant lack of focus in their own brand identity, as there is less emphasis on artistic vision than political content. Most respondents lament how museums become “warehouses” with interchangeable personnel, exhibits and collections, where most exhibits display some kind of political message [Linda]. This message becomes very palpable in some of the recent international exhibits being hosted on the local museum circuit including a series of photographs of Che Guevara and handicraft shows from Persia or Libya. Davila-Villa (2008) points out the absence of any exhibition of the country’s established artists or upcoming contemporary ones, all overshadowed by new politically-loaded exhibits that limit “the ability of museums to present either contemporary art or high quality shows.”

In tune with this wave of new Socialist ideals, where museums act as collective exhibition halls, the nature of curatorial programming shifts and the possibility of putting on individual shows becomes a rarity, rather than a norm. In practice this means that few artists can count on a solo retrospective unless their work is political sympathetic with the current regime.

Testifying to this move towards over-inclusionism in the arts, Venezuela's museum circuit has hosted macro-exhibits (*Mega Exposiciones*) aimed at including all levels and profiles of artists. In the first edition (2004) museum collections in storage were grouped together and spread across the nation's network of museums. In a zealous attempt to include everything, museums were filled to the brim with paintings and sculptures, resulting in what most viewed as a "horrible" and badly curated mishmash of genres: "they exhibited everything, even the last pin they could find, everything" comments visual artist Jacobo. One artist, Carmelo, unknowingly took part in the first edition of this macro-exhibit, testifying the lack of cultural capital of museum personnel:

"Well, I took part involuntarily since those works of art [in the museum] are no longer my property and they can do what they like with them, in fact, ... in the photograph that I saw, they had placed it the wrong way around. But well, I didn't go – I don't go [to the museums] – since Chávez has been in power, I've hardly visited [them]."

In the second edition of this event (2005), the museum network made an open call for artists to display their work: "artists and non-artists ... everyone was placed together in the same bag" [Isaac]. These shows are demonstrative of an "outburst of Populist Art," due to its need to "embrace all works [of art]" (Esteva-Grillet 2010a; 2010b) thereby fully embracing a radical Socialist message "that we are all created equal" and therefore all have the ability to create art and the right to showcase it [Carmelo, Paloma]. Again, this clashes significantly with the cultural branding processes of the art market, shedding the distinguishing tool of art professionals operating within an established art world framework, and belittling the creative discourse of the artist as creative individual. Angered by the event's complete dismissal of any curatorship and conceptual narrative, some saw it as a "prostitution" of the museum circuit [Nicolas], carelessly devaluing the work of already established artists and essentially tainting their brand image.

Figure 5. The all-inclusive macro-exhibit

Venezuela's 2nd edition of its macro-exhibit, where works of all genres and abilities are clustered together and displayed across the museum network. Lacking any curatorship, amateur paintings and sculptures were showcased alongside the work of professional artists. Here, we observe the above-mentioned tendency towards *venezolanidad* (a truer Venezuelan identity), with uncouth ethnic imagery. Source: Exhibition's catalogue '*Megaexposición II: un espacio para los artistas del siglo XXI*' [*Mega-exhibit II: a space for artists of the 21st century*].



The lack (in China) and continued disregard (in Venezuela) of curatorial experience hurts artists' careers as they are unable to gain status or reputation to establish themselves, and consequently preventing them from operating on the international art market. We witness here how the voice of the cultural broker is repeatedly ignored or silenced, as it appears to go against the broader national image that the nation wishes to portray. Art professionals, thanks to their cultural capital, are able to play by the rules of the global art "game." Their experience of the market and understanding of dynamics of the art world allow them to actively shape artistic discourses for contemporary artists that can be translated for local and international audiences. Due to polarization in the case of Venezuela, these cultural brokers have now been relegated to

the private sector in that qualified art professionals have fled from the museum network and now operate from commercial galleries or alternative art spaces. In China, similarly, many of the civil servants put into cultural roles lack the knowledge and expertise of the art world, which is required to compete internationally. Furthermore, they (as well as their private sector counterparts who may be more familiar with the workings of the art world) are severely limited through censorship and at the mercy of inconsistent policymaking. Lacking a coherent institutional support mechanism, alongside the all-important cultural broker to contextualize the work of the artists within this institutional framework, contemporary artists working in China and Venezuela today must seek alternative venues to validate their work locally and, whenever feasible, gain access onto the international art market through parallel structures in other countries. We thus demonstrate the ideological and bureaucratic complexities in which artists must operate and demonstrate a significant lack of understanding of artists' needs at policy level as well as a failure to implement a coherent vision for the sector as a whole. Without a clear direction, both the national brand image and that of the artists, becomes harder to establish and communicate. In the instances when the brand is clearly communicated, it is perceived as too far removed from the realities of the contemporary art world narrative. To sum up, Figure 6 encapsulates our research journey from start to finish, where we have mapped out our objectives, our research context, the themes and categories highlighted in our data analysis, examples of primary data to justify our findings, and finally our theoretical implications, all presented in a clear, coherent, and readable format. From this diagramming data exercise, the following section covers our discussion and final thoughts.

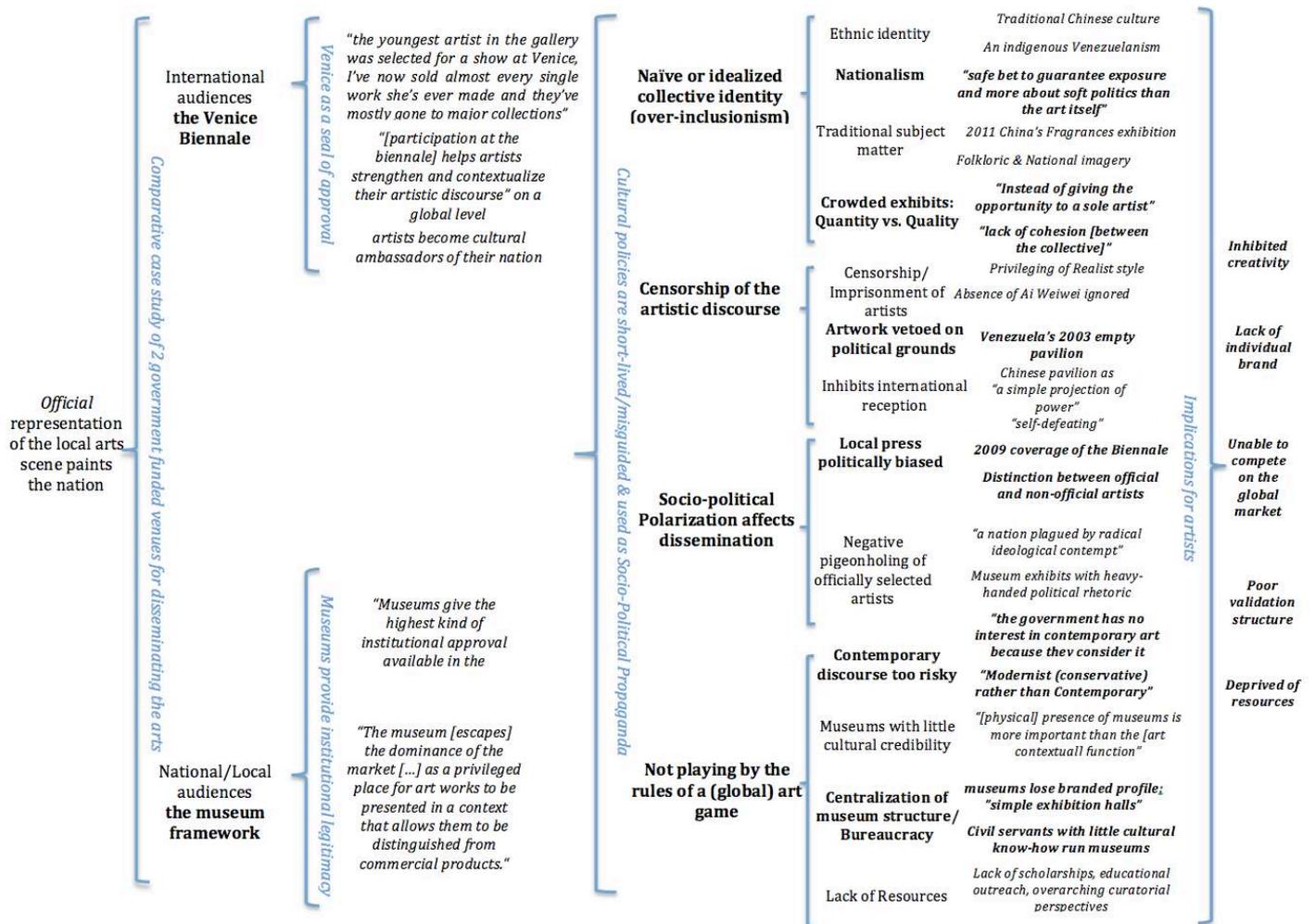


Figure 6. Diagraming our research journey.

Discussion and Conclusion

While the notion of art for art's sake is generally assumed when discussing the work artists produce, this article demonstrates the impossibility of separating the artwork from the macro-level context in which it is produced, distributed, and consumed. Our analysis shows that the nation's branding of art, the art world, and the art market's branding of that nation's art and the artist's own brand are all inextricably linked although not always aligned. From our findings –

and in tune with branding spheres that we developed in Figure 1 – we show that for successful emergence on the international art market, artists must work within these three branding spheres to add value to their work. Yet in our comparative case study we see that the legitimization criteria of these spheres, particularly that of the art world and that of the nation, are at odds. This tension is captured in Table 2 where we expand further on our participants' voices. Both sets of artists are restricted due to the governmental influence that tries to promote a certain nationalist identity in terms of what it supports, in Venezuela, and what it allows, in China.

Table 2. Our Participants' Voices

Naïve or Idealized Collective Identity (over-inclusionism)	Censorship in the Artistic Discourse	Socio-political Polarization affects Dissemination	Not playing by the rules of a global art game
<i>Museums privilege traditional styles, even so-called contemporary spaces: Shanghai MOCA had two exhibits on recently. One was a new ink movement show and the other was a contemporary group show. The two were in conflict and the artists were lost in these juxtapositions. [Oliver]</i>	<i>We represent an artist whose past work was banned which caused significant financial troubles. We can't show or sell her work and only have a documentary of previous shows as a record of what was made. [Louise]</i>	<i>Only Westerners are interested in the Chinese political side, it is profitable but is not appreciated within China [i.e. it is unofficial]. [Emilia]</i>	<i>All the public museums are run by civil servants, the government, very conservative – indifferent to what's happening in the world. They don't want anything too challenging. [Stephen]</i>
<i>[For the Macro-exhibit] the walls of the institutions were lined from floor to ceiling with naïve and kitsch paintings ... horrible. [Jacobo]</i>	<i>Artists that are aligned with the Revolution lose their creative freedom to an extent ... it can't be easy for them to have someone dictating what they should create...what they have to do to build what the government calls the 'new nation' [Linda]</i>	<i>[The curatorial programming] that was part of the previous administration and anything from the previous administration is now considered 'bad' [Felipe].</i>	<i>[Regarding the quality of museum exhibits today] The Popular Art criterion dictates that everyone is an artist. The Ministry says 'We are all artists – we are all creators' so that means that there is no selection criteria because that goes against this inclusionist ideal and we must include everyone, and that is demagoguery. [Rigoberto]</i>
<i>The Chinese pavilion is 'politically correct' but this does not mean it has artistic value. [Peter]</i>	<i>You have to sell your soul to develop a career here [Peter]</i>	<i>Contemporary art shows tend to be weak group shows; this is why there is a huge divide between the general public and the artworld. They are not educated, the only platforms where they are shown are very small or inconvenient to get to or in commercial galleries so are not well curated. Moreover, there is no opportunity to see much international work so both the public and artists have no idea what is going on. [Amy]</i>	<i>The discussion about the [arts center] has been going on for so long, I don't know if will ever be built. It's all about real estate money – so there will be apartments on top of it. [May]</i>
<i>Nothing that had been built up before [in the artworld] makes</i>			<i>One doesn't go to Venice with the goal of helping an artist to get into the</i>

<p>sense anymore – all previous [art] efforts are simply considered by the current government to be a vulgar and subordinate copy of the great cultural centers from around the world, so NOW we are truly showcasing authentic Venezuelan culture. [Felipe]</p>	<p>There is a dissemination of a political ideology in the arts, which just isn't right. [Linda]</p>	<p>[Previous museum staff are pigeonholed politically] so that there was a raid on researchers, curators, [museum] directors ... people with a long career in the museum field. [Carmelo]</p>	<p>international [art] circuit, but rather one goes to Venice like an uninvited guest that gate-crashes a party he wasn't invited to... with no continuity - like a free holiday for those who work at the Ministry of Culture. But there is no consequence for the participating artists...I mean it has little importance for the artist's career. [Jorge]</p>
<p>We were 3 artists presenting [at Venice] that year, this is usually the case. Unfortunately, that does not really allow us to make the most of the space. [Bruce]</p>	<p>The Biennale website is blocked in China as it shows un-official work by artists such as Ai Weiwei. [Peter]</p>	<p>The work that goes to Venice is always safe; it's curated by people who are well connected to guarantee exposure. We don't take it very seriously. [Bruce]</p>	<p>Can't support young, emerging if only art fairs and auctions – the money doesn't actually go to the artist. [April]</p>
<p>There is a sort of overvaluation of what they refer to as 'popular'. Popular Art has always existed in Venezuela [...] the problem today is that ideologically it is the presented as the sole expression of culture worthy of recognition and dissemination. [Armando]</p>	<p>Although politics have always played some role at the Biennale now it has become much more perverse - taken from an ideological stance so the discourse has become much more rigid, revolutionary, socialist which is immensely boring and nobody cares anymore. [Felipe]</p>	<p>There is polarization in Venezuela – the image of those artists that are selected [for the Venice Biennale] is generally quite a negative one in the eyes the Venezuelan cultural sector who is predominately of the Opposition group and that is a considerable blow. [Armando]</p>	<p>Civil servants aligned with the government are now running the museums [so that] art professionals that have amassed experience in the curatorial field, in managerial positions, or rather those in the intellectual field are ... psst [made redundant] with no further consideration. Making THEM take the blame [for the deterioration of museums] [Rigoberto].</p>
<p>The museums do not have good shows and they are closed for months at a time, they are not trying to educate the public. The director [of the contemporary art museum] told me they spent a lot of money on the last show but it wasn't a very strong show, the critics liked it though because it's not contemporary it's modernist. [Kai]</p>	<p>In the museum have to make everyone happy which is an impossible project. The system wants to judge everything so creativity is lost in the process. There are too many rules; they use management as an excuse to prevent artists from doing what they want. There is tension between the social system and the creative industries. However, if you know someone you can do anything, it's all about relationships. [Oliver]</p>	<p>The museums are so conservative that to create interesting work you have to set up your independent spaces in order to contextualize, socialize and theorize the work. However, our position is always insecure. [Bruce]</p>	<p>I just finished a show in MOCA Shanghai – the show was disappointing as no curation, so it was out of control. Moreover, logistically it was terrible; administration does not seem to exist. We shipped a bamboo structure in but it took so long that it was late and we had to send another by flight, sending coasts soaring. It's the same with art fairs here, the management is so bad – they lose work, it's damaged or you can't get it back or the opening is at the wrong time. There are not enough professional curators, institution, critics, which hampers artists' professional development. [Oliver]</p>
<p>[At the biennale] now they try to have some ethnic or indigenous quality [at the pavilion]. They pretend like it is a pluralist event [open to all] when it isn't. [Humberto]</p>	<p>The policies that support Popular artists are prejudiced: in order for those artists to survive they have to continue depicting a particular artistic narrative, within those [Popular] parameters, within than imagery and with that iconography, if not they are cut off from funding. [Carolina]</p>	<p>There are 2 types of artists: some that work on their own initiative and are more underground and others that, because of the country's circumstances, take advantage of government projects and Revolutionary ideals. Those are the marginalized artists and the others are the imperialist artists and that is the kind of rhetoric we have. [Felipe]</p>	<p>Museums are no longer spaces of any interest because there is no research, no curatorship and no kind of [artistic] rigor. There is no platform for contemporary art. [Amelia]</p>
<p>Most artists and galleristas train elsewhere and all the big</p>	<p>The government says they promote cultural and creative industries but officially they make life very difficult. For example they</p>	<p>There is a large gap between what the</p>	<p>Wanted to do an installation of public art outside the arts center – to get it</p>

galleristas are international, they have the expertise the locals don't. If you study in China, there is only one style and the emphasis is on technique, not ideas.
[Amanda]

have banned artists from working in industrial centers where they can get cheap studios. Another example is they have provided free space to work but it's on the 7th floor with no elevators, so artists can only work on paper, its totally unrealistic situation.
[Bruce]

government say they promote and what they actually promote. Officially you are restricted and we are never sure of what will happen. [Bruce]

done needed to get approval from 6 different departments. Makes things impossible, have freedom to do it but trying to actually do it is ridiculous – endless bureaucracy so I gave up eventually. So when institutions want to do public art projects it's very difficult.
[Oliver]

Popular art has to do with imagery, [it is] very juvenile; it has to do with traditions, religious customs, iconography; it is colorful and generally created by artists from a more humble background. It's an easy recipe for 'this is genuine, autochthonous, this is ours, this is Venezuelan' but a Popular artist never enters the contemporary art field...his work has been tainted by a Populist brush. [Carolina]

[Pedro Morales' work for 2003 edition of the Biennale] it was a video with Chávez and it showed all the things that were going on in Caracas [Opposition marches in 2002] and there was nothing made up there... but he was just an artist that was working with a new medium, with video and digital art, and there it all was, well ... the reality that we were living here in Venezuela was out. And they [the selection committee] didn't like the work because they didn't want the world to see what was happening here; so they vetoed. [Carmelo]

When you've got polarization you don't have a single tendency. The problem here is that when an artist gets involved in politics he gets rejected by the other field. Normally in countries where there are political movements, which are at odds with one another, there is usually a social message in the artwork, but that is not happening here. There is some sort of denial of that political side of art. [Alana]

[On Mega Exposición's lack of selection criteria] anyone who painted could send something in ... even the doorman of the museum could hand something in and they would hang it up
[Isaac]

Those that control the market and the mechanisms for legitimizing art ultimately control the perceived meanings of the work, the narratives that get picked up as authentic, and therefore the value of it. This has implications for other products that are valued for their symbolic properties. Cultural branding (Holt 2004) is found to be a useful tool to understand these narratives and as Askegaard and Kjeldgaard (2007) show, branding can be both “seductive, manipulative and representing the hegemonic intensions of Western [or other] marketers,” it can also be “an effective tool to secure a position in the globalizing world” (p. 145). Dong and Tian (2009) show that the nation is a dynamic force and the power of brands lies in their ability to articulate new imaginings of the nation. We would argue that this is particularly so in the case of artistic brands which operate in an non-utilitarian and fully symbolic context. By acknowledging

and examining macro-level political pressures palpable in our two chosen contexts, it becomes possible to expose the barriers artists' face (the implications highlighted in Figure 6) and start to look at ways in which they can successfully steer their careers past them. These barriers are particularly significant in newer markets where the art market remains under-developed. Further studies of emerging art markets are needed, as it is through such comparative studies that we can consider alternative structures and discourses and how these can interact with the dominant Western legitimization structures.

Revisiting the initial issues we set out to examine, notice firstly how the image that nations build for their contemporary artists will stem from core ideological discourses that shape the country's political makeup. We see how the concept of nation branding through control of cultural production limits artists' creativity and freedom of expression as well as their careers in terms of distribution opportunities. Secondly, the barriers that artists face in creating a brand narrative for themselves currently lies in the ideological divide between the national image being projected through cultural policies and the art world discourse, which reflects the wider legitimization structures of the international art market. Practically, this means that the artwork produced will either not be allowed (i.e., censored) or not be given access to the platforms that would contextualize and legitimize it artistically within the art world context. In both cases, the states' wish to portray the sanctioned Socialist ideology through art is found to be limiting and frustrating by the artists in these systems.

Thirdly, we set out that the brand narrative and art world narrative should ideally come together to create a sustainable art market structure that can compete on the global art panorama. However, our findings reveal a lack of understanding of the workings of the international art market at government level, which is reflected in erratic and ill-advised policies. In order to

access the open market, artists currently working under these regimes try to evade national policies, either by circumventing the national sphere, sometimes by leaving the country entirely, or alternatively by attempting to create alternative spaces of artistic legitimation and dissemination through unofficial routes, such as artists' co-operatives or use of private sector funding. Of course, these alternatives are not without risk for the artists involved. Ultimately, considering our branding spheres paradigm in Figure 1, when artistic discourse conflicts with the broader national brand image that the country intends to portray, then the artist's brand image struggles to expand beyond the realms of the home nation. In short, the artist's individual creativity operates within the realm of an art world, but also within the wider macro-environment where seemingly external factors in fact influence the dissemination of this brand identity.

DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) study of institutional isomorphism in organizational fields describes how bureaucratization occurs as the result of processes that make organizations more similar, without necessarily making them more efficient. They argue that isomorphism is a constraining process that homogenizes organizations and actors within them. In particular, their notion of coercive isomorphism is applicable to this study as it results from both formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependent. Indeed, in the cases presented herein, strong government pressure on what can and cannot be produced as legitimate art affects all the art world actors operating within these countries. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) describe how this pressure can lead to increasingly homogeneous organizations and lack of innovation. This is particularly troublesome in a field where innovation and creativity are the very *raison d'être* for the organization or artist and have long-term implications on the health of the art market in these countries. Moreover, as Beech points out "institutionalism in art is taboo. It is also rife" (2006, p. 1). Thus, we need to examine

some of the forces that operate in shaping the art world and its market and consider not only the obvious heavy-handed censorship on a governmental level, but also the implicit and more hidden censorship of the international art market itself in terms of which artists and which movements are accepted and institutionalized and how they are framed and positioned. This is more similar to DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) notion of normative isomorphism, where due to the professionalization of the field there is push towards homogenization to attain legitimacy, in this case, artists model themselves after others they perceive to be successful, working within what they consider to be the organizational boundaries of the art market.

We must also consider the earlier point of Robertson (2011) on "Westoxication" of local markets. How can emerging markets strike a balance between cultural protectionism and operating at the international level, which of course means being subject to competition? This is part of a wider debate for the creative industries in general. This article has been largely critical of Chinese and Venezuelan policies, but this by no means spares the international art market from critique. The art market's rapid expansion in the past couple of decades has resulted in an increased shift towards art being described in financial and marketing terms and used as a financial investment (Robertson and Chong 2008; Helmore and Gallagher 2012). This art industry impinges to an incredibly greater extent on how art is viewed, privileging auction results over reviews and sales to private collectors over public institutions, who have been hit by financial cuts. We acknowledge Joy and Sherry's (2003) point that art cannot be reduced to the discourse of the art market, but argue it is an increasingly valorized and powerful discourse. Established art world commentators such as critics Dave Hickey (Helmore and Gallagher, 2012) and Jerry Saltz (2007) have recently condemned the contemporary art market, suggesting it has become tainted by money, celebrity and self-reverence, whereby money has replaced intellectual

debate in judging art which leads to what Saltz calls empty product. Therefore, we seek to highlight the macro-level institutional difficulties for artists that are rarely acknowledged. While cultural protections may allow supposedly unworthy (in the view of the market) artists to flourish rather than improving the industry, we recognize that culturally or nationally-specific art is worthy of protection, particularly since, as Joy and Sherry (2003) note, significant imbalances remain in terms of the internationally famous artists being more likely to be Euro-American in origin. Art is necessarily commercial as the artist must be able to make a living and finance production, but it also provides an important venue for the enhancement of cultural identity.

Our analysis offers a counterpoint to Chong's (2012) research on what is lost when corporate concerns subsume the art world by demonstrating that complete avoidance of the economic system in place and focus instead on political concerns can be just as damaging. Both systems are meaningful and necessary and the nations we examine must engage with the international art market, as it is an unavoidable reality. Moreover, these systems can co-exist. Dong and Tian (2009) show that Western brands consumed in China are not used solely in contesting or re-imagining the official state vision, but also in reinforcing it. Artists themselves are adept at navigating between the two polarized spheres, creating new spaces through processes of hybridization. Therefore, multiple trajectories are possible, although these are beyond the remit of this article. We highlight again the role of art production and consumption in meaning- and therefore nation-making. Indeed, Zhao and Belk (2008) note the power of art in reconciling critical perspectives with hegemonic values to create various, often conflicting, public discourses. The use and misuse of art by the state is an interesting context within which to consider the intersections between markets, ideologies, societies, and culture.

We argue against pretending that art is a free space autonomous from systems of power and capital. While we offer a critique of China and Venezuela's cultural policies as they harm their artists' creativity and progression in the international market, we also investigate the discursive structures upon which the international art market itself is built, something ignored in most academic work on the art market. This web is increasingly complex. Historically, the relationship through patronage of royalty and religion was direct and explicit. Today, the relationships among art, branding, celebrity, gentrification, tourism, and politics are more nuanced and complex, but demanding of further investigation as they are far from being ideologically neutral and provide their own cultural hegemony. Our analysis attests that initiatives in China and Venezuela must move from focusing solely on production to distribution and training and development. In short, nation-branding needs to synchronize with the inner spheres of our branding paradigm, that is, cultural and artistic branding, in order to foster a healthy and sustainable art market structure. A business case can be made for supporting a national art sector and concentrating only on ideology obfuscates this. For example, Fillis (2004) and Reaves and Green (2010) demonstrate how artists can facilitate innovation and communication for organizations.

We also argue that the whole notion of new art markets or creating an art market is problematic. Indeed, the conception of a national market as a brand adopted by both the international art world and the respective national governments is imaginary in that it promotes a one-dimensional idea of the nation and fails to reflect on the multiplicity of identities within that nation (Kerrigan, Shivanandan, and Hede 2012; O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy 2000; Takhar, Maclaren and Steven 2012). Moreover it implies that there is a correct Western model to adopt. In fact, the very notion of the international art market is a false one in that it is

primarily geared towards the Western romantic notion of art, which ultimately acts as a filter in terms of what can and cannot be considered valuable. Through the sanctioning of particular styles, techniques, and subjects both the state and the international art market demonstrate ideological values and when these conflict, artists have to try and negotiate between them to position themselves on the cultural panorama. Nevertheless, the barriers these artists must overcome in order to do so are, as we have demonstrated, considerable. In both cases we see enormous potential as these art worlds have a rich and diverse history. However, current cultural policies curtail the role of art as a vehicle for social change due to an inability to make us see alternative perspectives and provide critiques of social practices (Biehl-Missal 2013; Chong 2012; Tadajewski and Hamilton 2013). To realize that potential we need the co-creation of more desirable collective and individual artistic images and the development of a cohesive national art network with sustainable cultural programming and education initiatives. This will help place the Venezuelan and Chinese art scenes firmly on the international map, thereby leading their artists towards global recognition and validation and thus hopefully providing a more representative global art world.

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