

Self-Marketing – a New Task of the Artist in the Competitive Art Arena

T German version

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The Competitive Art Arena

Cultural business in Germany and Europe has become increasingly significant economically, its sales have risen above average, and this has had a positive effect upon the labour market. The market for art, an essential field of cultural business, had developed appreciably. Sometimes people speak of an art hype. This is to a large extent due to the demand for a new, increasingly young and affluent class of buyers. They buy art particularly from young artists in order to emphasize their lifestyle. Despite all this hype and the rising sales and demand, it is clear that the art market is still a buyers' market where there is more supply than demand. The sheer quantity of art on the market makes it almost impossible for young artists to get the attention of the new class of buyers (one that, moreover, searches internationally). One of the many self-stated reasons for this is that less than half of the artists, at the most, succeed, with the aid of galleries and art dealers, to gain recognition for their work. In order to be successful in this competitive arena without the support of conventional intermediaries, some avail themselves of the opportunities for self-marketing. The artist does the marketing of his own art. The economic circumstances of those producing art show that this step is necessary. Their incomes from artistic activities are often scarcely enough to cover the costs of living.

The Artist as Self-Marketer

In the concept of self-marketing the art-maker expands his original task as a creator of art to include aspects like advertising, distribution and sales, thus becoming the entrepreneur of himself. The job of the artist to add value obtains here a new meaning: it is not only a matter of creating artistic value alone, but also a matter of independent activities of the value-creator across all levels of the chain of value adding. The success of the artist as a creator of value in the larger sense of the word is dependant largely upon his own ability to market himself. The artist is only then successful when he manages, using his own appropriate marketing activities, to stimulate an exchange process between artist and customer on a growing and increasingly international art market. The process has, as its goal, a reciprocal satisfaction of needs: the buyer gets the art and thus also a part of his lifestyle, while the artist receives remuneration and recognition for his artistic work. In contrast to the marketing of a business enterprise that retain employees or agents for such tasks (market studies, pricing, advertising and distribution, etc.), the independent artist has no access to them. He has to get involved in his own marketing. This implies two things: 1) the corresponding approach and behaviour and 2) a specific competency in order to do the self-marketing. Artists who do not (or do not want to) envision art as a business object will likely fail as dismally in marketing



Künstler: Carola Wechler-Knafla, Werk: „Parklands“
Courtesy: WhiteWall, www.whitewall.com



informatiKünstler: Patric Colling, Werk: „Lost Ange“
Courtesy: WhiteWall, www.whitewall.com



Künstler: Hugo Lange, Werk: „Karussell 10“

themselves as the artists who are active in marketing themselves without the least knowledge of the competitive arena, its rules, its actors, and their needs.

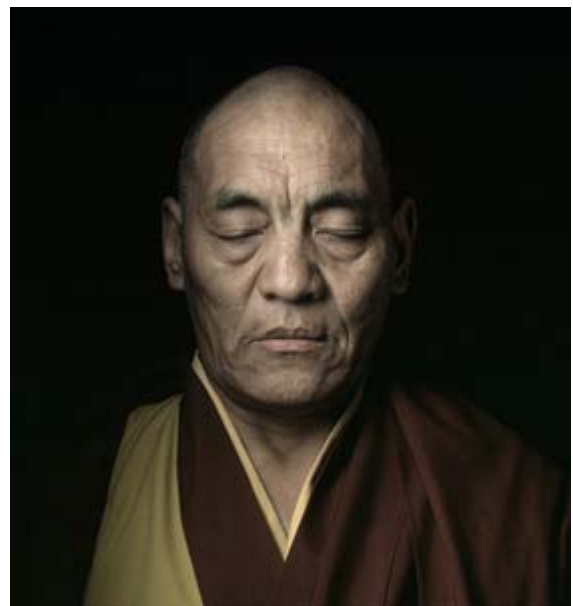
New Intermediaries and their Roles in the Self-Marketing of Artists

The new role of the artist as self-marketer and maker of the entire value adding chain demands much in order to become visible, distinguishable and attractive for customers in the internationally competitive arena. For this reason, many artists use the advantages of the internet in order to open their own web galleries. This form of self-marketing offers a number of advantages: it's cheap, it offers worldwide presence, a high level of market and price transparency, as well as up-to-date information about what is on the market. However, such a large number of artists are using such singular marketing strategies that the problem of being visible on the art market remains. In this situation it is helpful to cooperate with the intermediaries of the art market who support the self-marketing of the artists. Among such new intermediaries there are a number of individuals who have been offering services since the 1990s in the wake of the development of electronic business. Here one finds online galleries, databases or web-based competitions for art prizes. Such intermediaries act both with and without an interest in profit. Largely, they are concerned with using successful marketing strategies for products and services in the worldwide web, including the art market and also in support of the self-marketing artist. These platforms are often not only virtual places where artists can exhibit their art; the platforms also offer opportunities to strengthen the new role of the artist as a self-marketer and value-adder in the broader sense of the word. In many cases the artists not only present here their own artistic achievements, but also become part of the administrative system in the platform dealing with issues of judgement and quality. This is how the Celest Art Prize of the eponymous non-profit organisation was created (www.celestekunstpreis.de) in order to make it possible for "artists to permanently present their works to the outside world". In addition, Celeste offers the artist the opportunity to participate, with their own works, in a competition both as participant and as jury member. The internet gallery WhiteWall (www.whitewall.com) promises, through the use of the internet, not only more freedom in the art market ("every human is an artist, collector, gallerist), but also space for the artist in a larger public in which he can present his works either together with others (WhiteWall Kunstmarkt) or individually (WhiteWall Artist Page). And there are other examples that illustrate the idea of intermediaries as supporters of the self-marketing artists. Art for Everyone (www.kunst-fuer-alle.de) offers artists the opportunity to reach "a public of millions independent of the judgement of individual gallerists, and in a direct way". In addition to the original works, kunst-fuer-alle offers other products based on their databank in order to lure more interested people to the platform, thus attracting ever more attention to the individual artists. According to their own statements, the non-commercial central and transfer site iamiam (www.iamiam.org) is aimed at future graduates of European art universities and offers a platform for young artists where they "can be seen and found centrally". At the same time the artists gain an

Künstler: Hugo Lange, Werk: „Karussell 10“
Courtesy: WhiteWall, www.whitewall.com



Künstler: Felix Streuli, Werk: „Norzin“
Courtesy: WhiteWall, www.whitewall.com



Künstler: Felix Streuli, Werk: „Sopa“
Courtesy: WhiteWall, www.whitewall.com

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overview of the market here that helps them to position their art. These and other examples prove that artists developing their own self-marketing strategies encounter new intermediaries who can give them support. Particularly internet based platforms are well equipped to reach a new group of buyers who search internationally and often in the web for art works. The worldwide presence in such a platform and the relatively low costs argue for the artists' use of it. And yet there is some harsh criticism of the function of the new intermediaries and their methods. Particularly the way in which these agents exploit the achievements of the artists, the way they (despite claims to the contrary) demand fees from them and transfer the rights of their works, is criticized. The criticism is in some points justified, for the abuses really do exist. In other points, however, the criticism arose out of an idealisation or an ideal image of the conventional methods of marketing art: the individual gallerist, who serves as a mediator, with no ulterior motives, between the artist and the buyer, helps the artist in his development and the buyer in his construction of his collection. Even if there were such individuals and even if they predominated in the business, empirically speaking they are available only to a fraction of the artists. For the others, particularly for the young artists, the new platforms represent a realistic aid to self-marketing. But it remains the independent task of the artist to apply criteria of selection when choosing the intermediaries. Not every intermediary is serious, and among those who are serious one ought to choose those who suit one's own art and one's own artistic concept. Furthermore, the artist should check whether he commissions one or several partners with marketing tasks, in addition to having his own marketing platform. Here, the advantages of an intensive market approach as opposed to an exclusive market approach should be considered. Other criteria are the conditions and obligations the artists accept through their partnership with intermediaries. One ought to be particularly wary of their economic costs (fees and commissions) as well as of the control mechanisms available to the artists. It makes sense to choose only those intermediaries who define adequate qualitative criteria of their activities and demonstrate that they have adhered to the criteria (for example, criteria for choosing artists or engaging curators). Finally, there should be some guarantee that the artist has an overview of the process and the results of the intermediation at any time and that he retains the option to intervene in or to end the cooperation.

Resume

Clearly, the growing art market does not necessarily translate into a better market position for the artist. On the buyers' market of art not every artist manages to go noticed by customers using the classical concepts (gallery, art fair). Artists must therefore develop and use stronger strategies for marketing themselves. The new intermediaries can take on a fostering role in these strategies. Their selection and the concrete cooperation with them must, however, be carefully determined by the artists, and this must be an essential building block in the concept of self-marketing. Since it cannot be expected that the art market will soon become a sellers' market, the artists should be made familiar with the possibilities of self-marketing in greater detail already during their

self-marketing in greater detail already during their education. With appropriate courses, the artists would be capable of getting an overview of the entire chain of value adding from the creation of the work of art to its sale, and of making sure that they can master these tasks, and how. This is a challenge for both the agents in the education facilities for artists: for teachers as well as for students of art.