

DROSTE

EFFECT

Bulletin

#9



Media Art
and the Art

Market:

What's

going on?

by

Alessio

Chierico

Media Art and the Art Market: What's going on?

Report of the symposium «Media Art and Art Market»
Lentos Museum, Linz 10.10.2016

by Alessio Chierico

«I would simply ask why so many critics, so many writers, so many philosophers take such satisfaction in professing that the experience of a work of art is ineffable, that it escapes by definition all rational understanding; why are they so eager to concede without a struggle the defeat of knowledge; and where does their irrepressible need to belittle rational understanding come from, this rage to affirm the irreducibility of the work of art, or, to use a more suitable word, its transcendence».

Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (1992)

Abstract

Media Art is a controversial term that identifies manifold artistic experimentations that refer to the use of media technologies as objects and/or as a subject of investigation. The larger part of this field developed independently from the usual art circuits, proliferating in contexts like festivals, research centers, academic institutions, but also on the Internet, through communities, mailing lists, and social networks. The classical institutions of art have for a long time now recognized and hosted some of the emerging forms that traditionally belong to Media Art, however, they also demonstrated suspicion and distance which limited the possible integration and understanding between the two sectors. In recent years, new

generations of digital native artists, who grew up in an established technological environment, use the imageries and topics of Media Art within the languages of contemporary art, prefiguring forms of merging between these two worlds. This process becomes evident when Media Art starts to question its position and its possibilities to enter the art market, which is one of the main routes to its legitimization into the mainstream art world and to its historicization. This text is a report of the Media Art and Art Market symposium, which aimed to address the current status and problems of the market of Media Art, particularly the compatibility of this sector with the general understanding of the art system.

The economy of art has always been a controversial aspect seen in the general reception of the production, dissemination and recognition of art. Historically, the economic conditions that permitted and sustained the realization, promotion and preservation of artworks determined both the arguable status quo of art and the legitimization of the art system. The Media Art field (a definition here used to identify more an environment than an art form) is a relatively new sector, which includes a large number of different approaches, and practices, which developed over several contexts and different economic formats. In the last years, some of the artistic directions that traditionally belong to researches in this sector attracted the interest of the art market. At the same time, several

artists started to develop strategies and profiles that flirt with the expectations of the traditional structures of this market. However, there are still several issues that need to be discussed on this relatively new phenomenon. There are problems related to the preservation and maintenance of technology-based art. Other problems are related to the aleatory materiality of digital works. Nevertheless, a possible obstacle can also be found in the compatibility between the languages and narratives that are commonly used by Media Art practice and the ones that are currently expected by the art system. Moreover, it seems necessary to question what is the general economy that sustains Media Art, and which are the possible alternative economic models that can support this cultural production.



Media Art and Art Market symposium, Lentos Museum Linz. Photo by Fabricio Lamoncha.

All these aspects motivated the formulation of the symposium «Media Art and Art Market»,¹ held on October 10th, 2016 at the Lentos Museum² in Linz. This event, organized by Interface

¹ <http://interface.ufg.ac.at/blog/media-art-and-the-art-market/>

² <http://www.lentos.at/html/en/>

Cultures from Kunstuniversität Linz, in collaboration with Ars Electronica, saw the participation of prominent artists, theoreticians, curators and gallerists, such as: Reinhard Kannonier, Stella Rollig, Gerfried Stocker, Christa Sommerer, Steve Fletcher, Christiane Paul, Annette Doms, Pau Waelder and Wolf Lieser. All the presentations introduced a wide variety of perspectives about the current situation and the predictive developments in the next future of the mixed economy that supports Media Art.

Gerfried Stocker brought his experience as director of Ars Electronica³ to express that festivals are the best formats where Media Art can be presented. In this sense, the economy of Media Art should not exclusively focus on the art market, but

³ <http://www.aec.at/>

it should acknowledge all the economies that surround this art context. However, it has been recognized that it is necessary to reinforce the dialogue between the traditional contexts where Media Art unfolded and the traditional system of the art market. This needs to be done in



Media Art and Art Market symposium, Lentos Museum Linz. Photo by Fabricio Lamoncha.

order to exchange expertise, give more opportunities to artists, and develop complementary functions that can help the recognition and evolution of Media Art.

These last points have also been shared by gallerists Steve Fletcher and Wolf Lieser, respectively representing Carroll/Fletcher, London and DAM, Berlin. Galleries need to embed their own function in the wide contexts of cultural acceptance and promotion of Media Art, while being attentive to the interests of the art market and the general directions of contemporary art. More specifically, Steve Fletcher warned about several common confusions and mistakes that can confine the growth of Media Art, as well as its reception by the public and contemporary art professionals. Inspired by the essay *Thirteen Confusions* by Amos Vogel, and by its revisitation by Dan Fox, Fletcher

stressed out the existence of certain issues and preconceptions that limit the Media Art field and its recognition from the general art system as well as the market. In his intervention in the symposium, Fletcher drew attention to certain circumstances which might influence the production and acknowledgement of artistic quality. The warnings he expressed show a fundamental view that incorporates contemporary art's major concerns in the acceptance of certain directions of Media Art.

Wolf Lieser focused instead on the peculiarities of the digital and its intangible nature, in relation to a market that is constantly, but not exclusively, searching for physical artifacts. Accordingly, the physicality of the art objects should not be seen as a necessary requisite for the market. The unique limit

is represented by the acceptance of new understandings of what an art object can be. Accordingly, the promoters of Digital Art – galleries, museums, etc. – should pay a special attention to the education of their audience and collectors. Taking Tino Sehgal's production as an example, Lieser demonstrated that the art market is able to deal with immaterial artwork. Collectors should acknowledge that the higher value of their acquisitions is not given by a fetishism for the objects themselves, but rather by the importance of sustaining artistic practices that have a certain cultural relevance.

The materialities of the digital are also the central argument of a presentation by curator and theoretician Christiane Paul. Paul specified that her interest is not necessarily bound to the idea of digital artifacts, but mainly to the forms of art



Christa Sommerer at the Media Art and Art Market symposium, Lentos Museum Linz.
Photo by Fabricio Lamoncha.

that acknowledge this digital era. In this sense, she talked about digital-born art. Thus, crossing all the practices that are identifiable as post-digital, post-Internet, etc., she questioned the binomial relation between the materiality of the digital

and its possible manifestations in the physical space. Stressing out the complex entanglement of materialities which are at the roots of the digital, as well as the forms of objectification of the digital in «physical» responses, Paul defined the term «neomateriality». This can be considered as a central concept for finding certain touching points between the realm of contemporary art and the general understanding of Media Art.

Within the speech of Christa Sommerer, materiality is questioned into the framework of the conservation of Media Art and its related issues. Presenting her activity as artist, educator, and head of the Interface Culture department, she dedicated special attention to the complicated maintenance of Interactive Art. On the one side, this has been treated as an argument of discussion,

while on the other it configured a form of self-reflection about the pure nature of Interactive Art, an inspirational topic that drove the production of *Portrait on the Fly*,⁴ a work she made together with Laurent Mignonneau.

Going back to the art market system, the symposium covered several different activities that have been developed in recent years. In particular, we should take into account the interventions made by Annette Doms, who exposed the experience of organizing and curating UNPAINTED, the first Media Art fair, and the rich research about the art market based on online platforms made by curator Pau Waelder. Annette Doms showed her idea of a business model that can be supportive in the promotion of artists, as well as gallerists, curator and collectors, who work in the field of Media Art. The

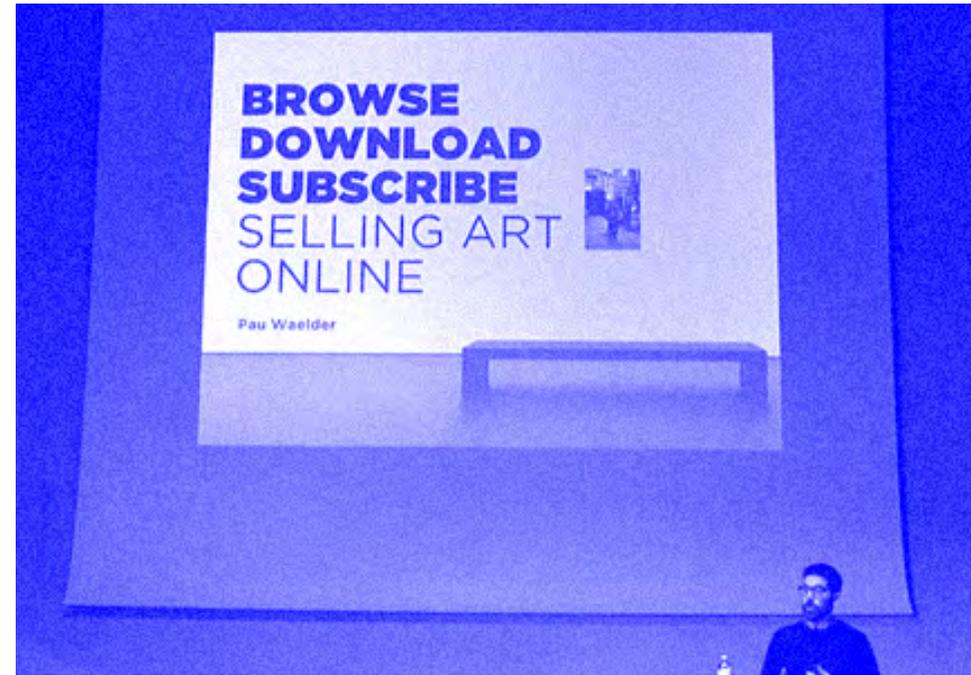


Christa Sommerer & Laurent Mignonneau, *Portrait on the Fly* (2016). Courtesy of the artists.

⁴ <http://www.interface.ufg.ac.at/christa-laurent/WORKS/FRAMES/FrameSet.html>

successful experiment of the UNPAINTED fair in Munich created the possibility to set an important meeting point for the different realities which gravitate around Media Art and its market. Moreover, Doms exposed her concerns about the way new technologies have deeply influenced the art world. Accordingly, she feels that it is necessary to rethink some of the usual criteria in which art has always been evaluated and collected.

The contribution of Pau Waelder crossed the recent and prosperous experiences of Post-Digital and Post-Internet Art, also giving precious hints on how this phenomenon reshaped the complicated encounter between Media Art and the contemporary art world. His research acknowledges Post-Internet Art, as an example of an artistic sector that triggered the attention of the art market toward the



Pau Waelder at the Media Art and Art Market symposium, Lentos Museum Linz. Photo by Fabricio Lamoncha.

art practices that reflect over technologies. This trend has been considered by many a short parenthesis, but it set a precedent of a successful artistic production for the art market, in the general context of New Media Art. In addition, Waelder focused

on the advent of online platforms for buying and selling art, and all the new opportunities and limitations that these can provide.

The art market is an argument that implies manifold perspectives and that raises potential ethical issues. For this reason, it is necessary to acknowledge it and, when it might be found necessary, discuss the nature of its structure, in order to understand its sustainability. It is even reasonable to question whether an art market for Media Art is really needed. Arguably, any possible answer cannot deny the need for an economy which can sustain the activities of this cultural context. It might be necessary to create new models, and/or it might be sufficient to promote and better understand the potentials of the already existing ones. Any of its possible developments depends on

the participation of the entire community in this discussion. The Media Art and Art Market symposium intended to be the starting point of all these conversations.

The entire debate crossing the art market and art economy, but also art and social practice, needs to acknowledge and fulfill manifold aspects of both the art system and the contemporary cultural context. From this perspective, we can see that there are still many issues that necessitate an answer. Mainly, it is important to draw attention toward the criticalities that can emerge from the relations between economy and culture management. Thus, how is it possible to quantify the idea of value in cultural terms? Contextualizing the current cultural ecosystem, we should not forget to include a discussion about the psycho-social conditions that influence artists' lives, expectations, and

interests. Consequently, which are the directions that could be followed, in order to create a sustainable economy of art? Which economic alternatives can still be imagined?

Art theory already acknowledged the vocation of art in reflecting about its own existence and meaning. This tendency determined the formulation of a critique directed toward art institutions, hence to their understanding and taxonomical view of art. In this sense, it is crucial to restore and update some artistic investigations which reflect on the art environment, and that rehabilitate an «institutional critique». This is essential in order to place and integrate the function of art and its economy in the complexity of the current global sociopolitical context. In fact, the art market, as any other economic sector, is heavily influenced by

the agency of global economics and their process of financialization, which leads to the emergence of problems related to the speculative nature of markets, and to the forms of «corruption» of cultural and intellectual production. •

Alessio Chierico is an artist and researcher with theoretical background in contemporary art, design theory, and media studies. He is currently a PhD candidate at the Interface Culture department of Kunstuniversität Linz (AT), and graduated in the same university. Chierico has been a visiting student at IAMAS Institute of Advanced Media Art and Sciences in Ogaki (JP), and is a former student of NABA in Milan and of the Art Academies of Carrara and Urbino (IT). In the last ten years of activity, he had more than sixty exhibitions, including: NTAA/Update (Ghent, BE) Flux Factory (New York, US), MAXXI (Rome, IT), Darbast Platform (Tehran, IR), Centro Luigi Pecci (Prato, IT), Roma Media Art Festival, Villa Manin (Udine, IT), ArteLaguna Prize (Venice, IT), Ars Electronica Festival (Linz, AT), Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea (Lisbon, PT), Victoria Art Gallery (Bucharest, RO), MAMbo (Bologna, IT), Speculum Artium (Trbovlje, SI). He regularly contributes with conferences, talks, and academic publications. In 2014, he was the recipient of the Lab Award (Augsburg, GER), and in 2008 he won Milano in Digitale (Milan, IT).