

## **~~Reproduction-gratuity-omnipresence-manifesto~~**

### **There is no business without demand.**

Just look around at the images of the works of art that make up this exhibition; they are reproductions from the police files on missing art, but they cannot be identified due to the image quality. The question thus arises about the paradoxical search for them. The reproduction of the missing work is pixeled and monochromatic, the description of its characteristics is purposefully imprecise and the authorship is not included. Such sloppiness is not down to a clumsy execution of the card, but rather reveals apathy and lack of enthusiasm; its search announces disinterest and failure. Well, what is the reason for persevering with the search? An international search for those works of art is not due to their theft – a criminal act that is time-barred in the majority of cases –but because there is consensus of their high value that justifies their search. Value that is down to the opinion of the stakeholders that create the art market. Forgetting the works and refusing to pursue them, as the police apathy seems to suggest, would mean denying the value that the art market has established for them and, by extension, questioning the opinion of the people behind the market. The fictional police search is a reality check for the value judgement with which the art world builds its existence.

The premeditated lack of quality of these images is distracting. Good technical reproduction of the works in this exhibition could keep the art of the works nearly intact, meaning, as Jorge Isla's exhibition shows, they would be able to still be viewed and exhibited. Even though they are missing, nothing seems to justify the sloppiness of their cards, which could be produced meticulously and with great image resolution. It rather seems that the intention is to erase them, to make them disappear, as if once they have been stripped of being commodities, their reproduction would become an inconvenient, awkward and illegitimate presence. This treatment that art reserves for an absent item reveals a critical content of the way the art market exists.

Yet, how does this market operate? Caution should first be raised about how the art economy works, which is a mechanism of productive relationships that remains conveniently unfathomable to its players. Demand and supply are required as in any business. The supply is the army of artists that create their works of art with the aim of

being able to place them with the demand, consisting of museums and collectors, who pay the work according to their price. A market is required for trade to function; where suppliers and buyers pit their wits, judge the goods and close the deal. This market emerges from the work by the intermediaries: gallery owners, auctions, art criticism, fairs, museum experts, academics, curators, opinion leaders, renowned artists and public foundations... By giving their opinion, consensus is created regarding the value of a certain work, and based on that value, supply and demand can set a price.

As we have argued, creation of value in art is a social construct, the result of market consensus that is nurtured by the cultural moment of its time and to which all art stakeholders contribute, but with unequal prescribing powers. Artists and art lovers form a multitude and plurality of voices that are hard to make out; conversely, collectors, renowned artists, gallery owners, curators, academics, experts and art fair attendees have tribunes to be individually heard. This asymmetry in the participation in the discourse of art tips the consensus balance in favour of the latter. Collectors and the establishment are not villains; they are individuals whose interests show clearly what they have to do: acquire price-setting power on a highly deregulated market. Market inefficiency is thus created and where the supply – the artists – foots the bill of creating the goods, and the demand enjoys the extraordinary profit from the sale – the collector –. The market creators receive, in the form of salaries and commissions, a fraction of this profit for the services rendered.

Facing this professionalised group which conveniently acknowledges itself to be an organic part of the art sector is the contemporary artist, immersed in a maelstrom of competitive anxiety to catch the attention of the establishment and the production grants, committed to the life ideal that requires creative freedom. With their dedication and creative drive, they constantly renew the flow of artistic proposals that emerge with irrational exuberance as dictated by the needs of the current art market. The small fraction of renowned artists does not represent an exception, but is rather a necessary symbol to naturalise this pattern of exploitation or *Gestell*. The vast majority of artists do not manage to overcome their status of resource to be exploited, forgotten in the trap of meaning of the importance to which they aspire for their work, the promise of recognition to come.

If Paul Valery warned that technical reproduction could marvellously change the very notion of art, it would not be only by virtue of the ability to stunt, in the worlds of Walter Benjamin, "the aura of the work of art", but rather by its factual power to subvert the tragedy of the artist. Contemporary art allows the authenticity concept of the here-and-now of the original to be overcome. The meaning of the contemporary work of art is constructed in the eyes of the viewer, in the intention of the artist and in the availability of the art object; its authenticity is updated by the mode of existence of its time. From this trio – intention, availability and view – the art market manages to maintain an influence consisting of the view, though highly impregnated by the aesthetic education arising by the dictates of the establishment which institutions and media blindly popularise. The view about contemporary art does not come naturally to the general public, that, lacking the aesthetic education that comes for coexistence with the work of art, observes it with bewilderment and reacts with indifference. Managing to reverse this semantic shortfall that hinders the general public's interpretation of art is the great endeavour that will save the artist.

The art in the contemporary era has still not explored the deep revolutionary potential enclosed in reproduction, which with its objection to the single item enabled by the current art market, can flood the lives of people with affordable and free artistic creations that will change the supply structure forever. Reproduction, gratuity and omnipresence of art to contribute to aesthetic training on a large scale; the artist will thus have a powerful ally to wrest the value consensus dictate from the current market creators.

If artists already bear the cost of the art, with their time and their own resources, obtained from public institutions, patrons and family, what prevents them from multiplying their production to donate it to whoever wants to adopt it? The number of units of a work does not impact the artistic value, but does prevent the creation of an art market that denies value to thousands of artists and constrains their artistic existence. Bring out the works, in all their formats, from the attics, warehouse, stores and houses where they lie waiting to turn a profit. Break this necessary partnership with the market in its current form, which all too often tends up with many works destroyed due to their

lack of commercial interest. It is worth giving them an opportunity to discover the world and change it radically.

The art object is perhaps the last sector of cultural creation that has yet to be revolutionised by the productive process aimed at the masses. Printing revolutionised science, by seizing knowledge from the feudal structures where it was a defensive moat against a third estate undaunted in the ignorance of its condition. Music was radically transformed by technical reproduction, by incorporating the masses in the diverse consensus of musical value, and enabling an expansion of the music economy that has professionalised musicians and technicians. Would it be so outlandish to think about an entry charge for a solo show, as is the case to see a music concert at the city's theatre?

However, this movement of the multi-reproduced, free and omnipresent art object is facing huge setbacks.

The first, and most pressing, is that the creator must still overcome the same risk to which the current art market is exposed, drawn on sufficient material means to ensure their continued artistic activity. The individual endeavour of the artist for the aesthetic education of the population is a decentralised public policy that society must compensate. Mutual support is fine, but it is not sufficient; some economic mechanism is therefore needed to enable that transition. The grants of the public and private institutions cannot continue to overlook the existential dimension of the artist. They urgently need to remunerate the individual who works on the creation and no longer only for producing the work. Inspiration can also be drawn from existing models of public policies for the economic promotion of art, such as the intermittence *du spectacle* in France, which help to provide livelihoods for people who dedicate their lives to artistic creation. If they have managed to impose a tax on transactions on the financial market, it is possible to imagine a contingency fund for artists from taxes on today's art market.

Neither can it be forgotten that barbarism stalks every revolution of the masses. The threat of seeing a cultural industry emerging from large-scale art is a clear danger. It is

not about changing the very notion of art, about it no longer being a means of exploring art's channels of existence, but rather losing it due to the instrumentality that dominates technology as know it. Walter Benjamin identified technology's threat to art because "society has not been mature enough to incorporate technology as its organ, that technology has not been sufficiently developed to cope with the elemental forces of society". Those premises and that time have expired. The speed of technology has hurled us into a technical era where cyber recursiveness emerges with organological properties and linguistic abilities with social power. Given the convergence towards a single cultural horizon imposed by modern technology, art offers the conditions to be fragmented into a multiplicity of cosmotechnologies, as coined by the philosopher Tuk Hiu. Artistic creation, in the same way as the recursive algorithm, allows the contingency to be effectively absorbed to increase the efficiency of its proposal. Technology, art and recursion embedded in reproduction, that is the proposal to respond to barbarism.

**Kike Rioz.**