

9) museum and the
social construction of
high culture
5) mobilizing
resources



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9) Museums and their contribution to the social construction of high culture

Having established that there is a hierarchy inherent in all aspects of the art world, as shown in chapter 4, I would suggest that capital plays a great part in determining this hierarchy.

The emergence of an active public sphere, has, over recent centuries, created a vibrant art market in much of the world. While this had broadened market opportunities, away from an old monarchy, nobility, or clerical order, it is arguable that a social elite, roughly corresponding to the economic elite, now possesses a strong hold over the art world.

Many artists of great talent are hidden from view because they have not successfully seized the attention of this narrow class. Their works are, consequently, permanently excluded from the significant galleries of modern art.

In this art market, driven as it is by private capital, an artist has to have the means to publicise their work and display it in galleries known to the wealthiest social classes, in order to meet with public success. One might ask, for example, with reference to the UK, whether Tracey Emin or Damien Hirst would ever have enjoyed their enormous success had they not been included in 'Sensation' – Charles Saatchi's 1997-98 exhibition of young British artists.

It is men like Saatchi who ultimately, due to their huge capital, have the means to control the general social perception of 'good' and 'bad' contemporary art. It is difficult, and perhaps impossible, to judge whether

such figures are successful because they really do understand what the public reaction will be to various works and artists or, as seems more likely, they are able to shape such reactions through the deployment of their capital and its influence.

It is possible to enumerate many factors which might have brought certain artists to the attention of the influential, highest social classes, and thus have brought them great success. They may have had some initial capital, which afforded them the leisure time to pursue their projects, and the ability to purchase materials and studio space. Talent and effort should not, of course, be excluded, but good social skills and the ability to communicate ideas must be seen as crucial factors, especially when presenting works to potential patrons, or attending social functions and exhibitions at galleries.

5) Mobilizing Resources and non-conventional materials

The market for traditional art materials, such as canvasses and paints, arguably shows some elements of monopoly, but just as contemporary artists have extended the meaning of 'art' far beyond painting and sculpture, a corresponding extension of art materials has occurred. Indeed, it seems that no material is now excluded from the art world.

With garbage now commonly used to fashion new art works, creative and innovative contemporary artists have been able to escape from the monopolistic market for art materials. They have also successfully appealed to a market which shows a growing awareness of 'green' issues, and the need to recycle and re-use, in order to lessen the strain on limited and expensive resources.

Some of the most famous, unconventional installations, such as Christo and

Jeanne-Claude's wrapping of famous landmarks, buildings and natural
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features, require huge expense, but it has now clearly been proven that it is possible to create and attractive and popular works of art using what were once considered to be waste materials.

Artists have successfully looked beyond the confines of the studio, and have found that there are tonnes of unwanted materials, which are usually cheap, and sometimes free, ready for the taking. By incorporating these into their projects, they have extended the meaning of ' art' in the contemporary world.