

Article

Inside and Outside the Market for Contemporary Art in Brazil, through the Experience of Artists and Gallerists

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Abstract: In this paper, I seek to extend our understanding of global art markets by focusing on the relationships between different art world agents and their perceived responsibilities and roles in a market considered locally ‘incipient’ and emergent on the global scene. For this purpose, I draw on over 50 interviews with art gallerists, independent art spaces and visual artists represented by them, living in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, the two largest clusters of the contemporary art market in Brazil, at a time of market expansion and internationalisation. In an incipient market, two main functions are considered important: Developing the commercial circuit and opening up the market, and; enhancing the value of art in society. Such functions occur against the backdrop of a large and complex country, where the ‘eixo’ (axis) of the main cities offers greater opportunities for visibility and valorization. The findings help to elucidate the perceptions of responsibility and roles in a context of market development, as well as the emerging boundaries between culture and the market. Moreover, the paper explores the emerging dynamics and strategies of art world development as they are enacted, offering insights into how art market actors perceive their roles and responsibilities, as well as the strategies available to them to support market consolidation.

Keywords: art market; Brazil; art world; art gallery; contemporary art

1. Introduction

In this paper, I seek to extend our understanding of global art markets development by focusing on the relationships between different agents acting in a market that is experienced as “incipient” locally, and emergent on the global scene. I elucidate on the experience of art market incipience, as well as on how artists and gallerists understand their role, position and responsibilities, but also those of collectors and art institutions, in supporting the consolidation of a market on its way towards achieving its full potential and development. For this purpose, I focus on insights from qualitative research in Brazil, a country with a long art market history (Durand 1989; Brandellero 2015), and with a number of contemporary artists who are recognized as pioneers internationally (Brandellero and Velthuis 2018). The research captures the experience of artists and gallerists in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, the country’s two main contemporary art cities, in 2013, at a time when Brazil was captivating international imaginaries due to its then imminent hosting of two international sporting events: the Football World Cup (2014) and the Olympic Games (2016). Within the art market, international attention for Brazil was also evident from its prominent feature in a number of state of the art market reports, from The European Fine Art Fair (TEFAF) to Artprice (e.g., McAndrew 2013; Artprice 2014). The timing of the research, thus, allows for insights into how art world agents envision the path to market expansion and consolidation, with a specific focus on locally-oriented needs assessment, practices and strategies.

Brazil has a longstanding and rich contemporary art world history. It hosts the world's second oldest art Biennial (São Paulo, Brazil, 1951), and since 1996, the country also prides itself on hosting the Mercosul Biennial, in Porto Alegre. Art gallery clusters, museums and cultural institutions have been taking shape and evolving in the country's two main cities since the pre-war period (Durand 1989). Notwithstanding, Brazil is relatively emergent on the global contemporary art scene, if one takes the prominence of its artists, collectors and museums for instance. Research on art galleries has shown the persistence of forms of inequality (Velthuis and Curioni 2015; Quemin and van Helst 2015; Fetter 2016), while in 2012, sales in the Brazilian art market represented a tiny 1% of global art market sales (McAndrew 2013). The Artprice report on the contemporary art market showed that, in the period July 2013 and June 2014, artists of Brazilian nationality accounted for 0.6% of auction turnover (Artprice 2014). Such findings are all the more striking when related back to the country's wealth and economic size, as the seventh largest economy in the world (OECD 2018).

Through qualitative interviews, observations and secondary sources, this paper offers new insights into how art world members perceive and frame their role in an incipient market, in relation to two interrelated goals: Enhancing the value of art in society, and sustaining the legitimacy of the commercial circuit in the absence of strong institutional resources and independent intellectualizing discourse (see Baumann 2007). My work focuses on the primary contemporary art market and explores relationships that relate to the production, circulation and consumption of artworks entering the market for the first time. Studies focusing on such markets have revealed the networked and social nature of artistic legitimation. Art galleries function as key gatekeepers regulating entry to the market, while also actively promoting the career progression and artistic and economic valuation of the artists they represent (Brystyn 1978; Giuffre 1999; Moulin 1987). Uncertainty is an inherent feature of art markets, particularly evident in the elusive negotiations entailed in the conversion of aesthetic into economic value for new and established artists (Moulin 1987). Studies of established markets have pointed towards the presence of strategy differentials and a clear division of labour within the gallery sector, depending on the level of uncertainty experienced by galleries and the risks they are willing to take to establish and maintain their reputation (Peterson 1997; see Moulin 1987). A differentiation emerged between more esthetically or commercially oriented galleries (Brystyn 1978). Gallerist deploy strategies to deal with the level of uncertainty experienced in the market, that critically depend on the resources available to them—be it their artists or own social capital (Peterson 1997).

Art galleries undoubtedly play a fundamental role in supporting the valuation of art. Yet, the legitimation of an innovative cultural product is also spurred along by a combination of wider societal factors, including the presence and support of patrons and of dedicated institutions, as well as the diffusion of an intellectualising discourse that helps to frame the value of an incumbent to a field, relative to its substitutes (see Baumann 2007; DiMaggio 1992). As shown in theatre and opera, the attention and sponsorship bestowed to a cultural product by wealthy patrons can enhance its prestige (DiMaggio 1992). Moreover, dedicated cultural intermediaries and institutions lend their legitimacy to emerging art through various instances of recognition, such as prizes, exhibitions and acquisitions (see Moulin 1993; Mulkay and Chaplin 1982). Institutions and experts are deemed vital to the valuation of new art, insofar as through their selection and choices, they contribute to buoy the public credibility in the value of art (Bonus and Ronte 1997). Specifically, in the field of art and culture, critics convey their appreciation through the use of discursive strategies, circulating the ideological foundations and intellectualizing discourse that lend credence to the value of art (Baumann 2007). Research on the social history and legitimation of film helpfully traced the role of these interrelated factors by taking a long-term historical perspective, and retrospectively identifying their combined influence on the valuation of film as art (ibid.). Yet, in the context of an art market experienced as 'incipient' such retrospective gaze is untenable, calling for alternative methods of exploration of such questions.

Research in emerging art markets shows a variety of institutional landscapes and arrangements, often revealing how local actors negotiate their position and evaluate it against what they perceive

as the blueprint of more established markets (Kharchenkova 2018; Sooudi 2016). Research on the Indian art market has shown how gallerists remedy a perceived institutional void through “makeshift practices”, adaptive and improvised measures such as weekly late night gallery openings and art weekends (Sooudi 2016) to patron and promote artists and their production and generate a buzz in the art scene in support of market development. Meanwhile, in Russian art markets, we see how, in the presence of strong non-commercial institutions, such as art foundations supporting artistic talent, may hamper market development altogether—opening up the possibility of understanding art worlds as more complex rather than bi-polar fields structured along a market/art divide (Komarova 2018).

Delving into the ties that bind art dealers and artists, the paper unveils their understandings of boundaries of, and their roles in, market development, in a historically and institutionally specific context. The findings are based on over 50 interviews with art gallerists and visual artists represented by them, as well as insights from collectors, curators and art teachers operating from Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, the two largest clusters of the contemporary art market in Brazil.

In this paper, I contribute to a dynamic picture of art market practices and their perceived boundaries, as they take form on the ground. Seminal works have informed us on the collaborative nature of art worlds (Becker 1982) and the specificities of established art markets and their agents in European and North American contexts (e.g., Crane 1987; Moulin 1987; Velthuis 2005; see also Bourdieu’s ground-setting work on cultural fields). More recently, a burgeoning field of qualitative studies have been devoted to unveiling alternative geographies of art market research. These studies have helped to complexify our appreciation of how localized and emerging art markets function and develop (Sooudi 2016; Kharchenkova 2018; Komarova and Velthuis 2018), paying due attention to local contexts and institutional affordances. This allows for a more fine-grained understanding of the experience of market emergence, in a way that treats it not as a homogenizing process but rather one where specific local contexts, challenges and opportunities are revealed (see also Komarova 2018).

My research in Brazil recorded a shared perception of a lack of a consolidated institutional, educational and critical landscape, adding uncertainty to a field in which success is in itself inherently elusive. Such incipience primarily took three forms: The need to stimulate demand for art among collectors and wider audiences, supporting the valuation of contemporary art on a societal level; to overcome the limitations of budgetary constraints and programming restrictions of public cultural institutions and museums in the country, but also the paucity of dedicated educational programmes on Brazilian art history; and the third was overcoming a perceived decline in objective art criticism and intellectualizing discourse on art, as also discussed by art critic and historian Rodrigo Naves (Kubik Mano 2010). While, the perceived gaps echo the three factors identified by Baumann (2001, 2007) as supporting the organizational and ideological valuation of film, my study suggests that alternative developmental paths are explored. My findings lend empirical substance to the strategies deployed by art market actors to deal with such context, pointing to a more structural adaptation of the gallery mission, as an emerging yet contested market *hybrid* spanning the boundaries of cultural and economic value, and the realm of public and private.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Setting

This article draws on over 50 interviews with art dealers, curators of non-commercial art spaces, and artists based in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil. The interviews were conducted in 2013, at a time of local ebullience of the Brazilian art market, in Portuguese and English. A report on the state of the contemporary art market in Brazil, based on a survey of galleries belonging to the Brazilian association of art galleries (ABACT) noted that such ebullience was experienced on different levels (ABACT 2013), notably: 25% of surveyed galleries had been set up after 2010, and the majority of respondents reported increases in sale volumes and staff expansions. Additionally, the report presented data from the Brazilian government’s export office Apex-Brasil showing a 33% increase in the value

of contemporary art exports (ibid.). The local *Mapa das Artes*¹, a bi-monthly print-based overview of exhibition openings in São Paulo since 2002, proved a very useful source to keep abreast of openings and exhibitions during the fieldwork—but also to get a sense for how the contemporary art scene had evolved in recent years. Consulting the archive showed how prior to 2010, the average number of gallery exhibitions advertised in an edition of the *Mapa das Artes* was 46, compared to 58 between 2010 and mid-2013.

2.2. Sample Composition

Contemporary art galleries were sampled based on years in activity and positioning in the market, ranging from galleries that focus on early career artists and established ‘blue chip’ artists. The gallery ages ranged from one to 39 years. Artists were selected based on their connection to one of the sampled gallery, either approached independently or based on a suggestion from the art dealer. Their longevity as professional artists varied from three years to five decades since the first gallery exhibition. Table 1 offers an overview of the respondents.

Table 1. Sample composition.

Location		São Paulo	Rio de Janeiro
Number of art dealers		20	9
Gallery age	minimum	1	1
	maximum	39	26
	average	9	9
Non-commercial art spaces		3	-
Year establishment international art fair		2005	2011
Number of artists		14	6
Artist age	minimum	29	27
	maximum	58	81
	average	43	47

During the semi-structured interviews, respondents were asked to recount their career trajectory, highlighting the people and moments that were particularly influential for them. Artists and gallerists were asked about how they work with each other and what they understood to be the main roles in their professional relationship. Moreover, respondents were asked to reflect on the state of the Brazilian art market and how they understood their roles in its development. For most artists in the sample, the threshold to the art market is the gallery door. Connecting to a gallery was an important moment in an artist’s progression (see Giuffrè 1999). Coming to this moment from diverse trajectories, entering a gallery team symbolizes the act of “getting into the [art] market” (p. 38). The artists I spoke to had diverse backgrounds: Some had finished art school, others were self-taught; some had science or chemistry degrees and were producing art on the side until they were “discovered”; others were designers or advertisers who preferred to work on their own creations, rather than responding to external commissions. Before joining a gallery, some artists were, either not selling at all, or selling sporadically to friends and acquaintances, usually resorting to another related profession to make a living (advertising, design, commercial photography, or teaching were mentioned, to name a few examples). Indeed for many, the transition to the art market was not always a hard break: many continued working other jobs until their artistic path had become financially viable for them. Moreover, prior to entering a gallery, few artists made a living from institutional and non-profit exhibitions, salons

¹ *Mapa das Artes* is now available online at: <https://www.mapadasartes.com.br/#!/home>.

and *editais*, call for projects, some of which were financed by the Ministry of Culture. Yet, such a career trajectory was more often associated with early career artists, or with those based outside of Brazil's two largest cities. Some gallerists refused to work with artists who had not taken part in salons, artistic residencies or institutional prizes (p. 25), while others claimed that they didn't pay attention at all to an artist's CV because it was all about 'the art' and the personal connection to the work (p. 28). While, some respondents echoed Velthuis's (2005) findings about the familiar and affective bonds between gallerists and artists in Berlin and New York, the language of "marriage" and "relationship" appeared more frequently in the interviews with gallerists (p. 11; p. 37), but also "friendship"² (p. 18) and "mentoring" (p. 32)—sharing the common feature of developing over the course of time and requiring dialogue and compromises (p. 32). A gallerist specializing in emerging artists even spoke of her role in "bringing artists to the world" (p. 14). Such warm and nurturing language contrasted with how artists referred to their gallerists, adopting more lukewarm and professional notions of "partnership"³ (p. 12; p. 32). The more professional nature of the relationship seemed to be emphasized by the fact that artist reported rarely discussing their work with their gallerist, on a conceptual or artistic level, partly due to lack of time (p. 12), but also occasionally a perceived lack of knowledge and ability (p. 72). Generally, gallerists were not seen as "interfering" in the artistic production, though some would give advice on the works when they were not selling well (fieldnotes). Building on the relationship metaphor, some artists struggled with their monogamous link to one art dealer, while dealers themselves were connected to many artists:

"the artist has just one artist to work with, himself. And the gallery has many as she has to have and so the thing is this balance, how personal [are you] gonna have this relationship with your gallery". (p. 38)

2.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed with attention to the following themes: Roles and tasks ascribed to artists and gallerists; understanding of their relationship; experience of market emergence and development; and internationalization and the internal and external perceptions of what characterizes the Brazilian art market and its contemporary art. In addition to the interviews, during the course of six months, I observed the art world by attending *vernissages*, auctions, art fairs, book launches, lectures, artist collectives meetings, and 'meet the artist' sessions. Additionally, I interviewed art collectors, journalists and museum curators. I also attended a course on art collecting, targeted at collectors and occurring around the time of the São Paulo 2013 art fair (SP Arte), organized by the Foundation Ema Klabin in São Paulo. The data was analysed in stages, with attention to emerging themes that captured the experience of market emergence (Charmaz 2006; Saldaña 2013).

3. Results

The data analysis illustrates how art market agents experienced the context in which they were operating as incipient, and sheds light on the strategies and practices enacted by them to establish and consolidate their operations against this backdrop. The experience of incipience related to an assessment of the institutional landscape in Brazil, in which three factors were often seen as lagging or in development. The factors relate to the three cornerstones of art world development and art valuation mapped by Baumann (2001, 2007), yet my findings show how hybrid organizational forms are developed to address the experience of incipience (see also Sooudi 2016). Firstly, artists and gallerists reflected on, and adapted, their practices to the symbolic and geographical boundaries of

² Exceptionally, one gallerist insisted he in telling me he did not consider artists in his team to be his friends: his relationship was purely professional, 'we don't go out for drinks' (p. 44).

³ All interviews ended with a set of questions asking respondents to reflect on art world figures they admired. When asked which gallerist they admired the most, many artists refused to give an answer, some jokingly adding that they were allowed to skip one having answered so many (p. 33; p. 9; p. 70).

the market. Secondly, galleries and independent spaces framed their activities as partly stepping into a perceived institutional gap, fulfilling the visibility and accessibility function normally attributed to museums and cultural institutions. Indeed, institutions, such as museums and public cultural spaces were generally assessed as lacking the funds to be able to collect, preserve and showcase established and emerging artistic talent. Thirdly, gallerists, artists and curators actively pursued the spread knowledge and intellectualizing discourse (Baumann 2001) about Brazilian art, its history and contemporary scene, addressing the perceived need to support the wider societal appreciation for contemporary art. Artists and gallerists alike favoured the societal diffusion of art history appreciation, the strengthening of dedicated curricula in higher and further education, and of objective art criticism. Tackling such perceived knowledge and information lag was seen as not just supporting the training of future generations of art world agents, but also as contributing to diffusing the ideological foundations of art valuation among potential patrons and collectors. These findings allow me to develop a rich understanding of how artists and gallerists perceive their roles and responsibilities in a context of market emergence. In what follows, I first sketch the experience of the market at the time of the fieldwork, and subsequently I focus on the strategies and practices enacted by artists and gallerists to establish themselves and consolidate the art world.

3.1. *Being in and out of the Market*

For artists, the first gallery exhibition usually symbolically marked the transition into “entering the commercial circuit” (p. 26; also p. 70; p. 15; p. 71): A switch, which also meant that artists started selling their art in a more formalized way, through the intermediary of the gallerist. Yet, even then, “the artist is outside of everything” (p. 71) or “in parallel” to it (p. 70). Their relationship to the commercial circuit was always seen as mediated by the gallerist (p. 15, p. 71). While, many would deny knowledge of “this other side” [i.e., the market]⁴, they would nonetheless offer unprompted assessments of how ‘good’ or ‘bad’ their gallerists were at their job. Indeed, relationships with gallerist generally broke up when a gallerist wasn’t considered able to develop a market for an artist (e.g., p. 70; p. 9). When placed in an international context, a weak sales track record was not always solely associated to a gallerist’s skill: As one artist lamented that his type of paintings was not “in fashion” abroad, while another considered his works to resonate differently by country (p. 31; p. 15). Such struggles did not go unnoticed, as competing gallerists would lure artists away from galleries that were failing to sell. Gallerists also reflected on their ability to sell an artist’s work. The most eloquent description of this process came from a relative newcomer, yet very successful, gallerist in São Paulo:

“the gallery is, has to be a very good story-teller, so it’s about understanding the best content, understanding the deepness of each artist’s content and universe, and understanding to whom and in which way you’re gonna tell the story”. (p. 28)

While the artists I spoke to were based in São Paulo and Rio, many had moved to one of these two cities from other parts of the country. Such “artistic gravitation” towards the Rio-São Paulo *eixo* was driven by the concentration of social networks, resources and institutions that are known to enhance the prospects of artists and cultural entrepreneurs (Menger 1999; Scott 2000). Career opportunities were much improved by this gravitation (p. 23; p. 47). Particularly in the context of such a diverse and large country as Brazil, moving to one of these two cities was often felt as a necessary step in an artist’s career, yet this came with a cost. An artist from Olinda reflected on his experience there, before moving to São Paulo, concluding that he was much freer before his move. “Because I think

⁴ Knowing when a connection to a collector or to another gallery was appropriate was a delicate question. For example, an artist with gallery representation in Rio and São Paulo told me that he ‘didn’t need to know these people’ referring to other gallerists and collectors—because once you start networking, you begin to act as a gallerist (p. 72). Indeed, artists would cite other artists as being their most important counterpart in the world, and the rare mentions of socializing with collectors were evoked as occasions during which art—not sales—were on the agenda (p. 24).

here in São Paulo, even before the market, when you go to study, the wannabe artists, you go to, you know, you have some system to follow.” (p. 47). Even though there was no clear “instruction guide”, the perception that there was a system you needed to fit into if you wanted to be an artist felt quite “oppressive” (p. 47). Artists based in Rio felt relatively freer, and while they felt the need to keep their connections with galleries, curators and institutions in São Paulo – they preferred to be in Rio, outside the “industrial system” (p. 72). “If you are in São Paulo, you have to be part of the system, go to openings, and then you are working for the system rather than as an artist” (p. 72; p. 71). Being ‘in’ the market and working with a gallery meant learning the rules of the game. For instance, an artist with a career spanning five decades, shared with me how in the 1960s, he would regularly give away works at the end of exhibitions, or as gifts to friends and lovers.

Artist: ‘When you have a thing like a ‘musa’ (muse), I have someone I love, you make, you give, you send. [It’s] another time now.

Interviewer: Why is it not possible to do this anymore?

Artist: “If I do this, people put in auction. That’s the game. [. . .] if you give, people put the frame, and they sell what you give. So.. you don’t feel good, if you give to someone, you write ‘With love’ and you see in auction, written ‘With love’. It’s not a good sensation. So I stopped giving. Even the gallery [. . .] they say: “[name], if you work with me, you have to change your ways, because art has value, you cannot give at the same time you sell, you cannot give. Please!”.

The artist lamented how such market connection had an impact on his personal relationships with friends and acquaintances. Being ‘in’ the market, thus, had spillover effects which were experienced in artists personal lives.

Rio and São Paulo were perceived as having different markets, with different tastes, and beyond the eixo (the Rio-São Paulo axis)—there were many more regional realities, with their peculiarities and “personalities” (p. 37). São Paulo was reputed to have a wider market and a more developed art scene, while Rio prides itself on being home to some of the country’s more internationally acclaimed artists. A number of more established artists were represented by several galleries in Brazil and abroad, in line with the widening market interest in their work (see also [Peterson 1997](#); [Giuffrè 1999](#)). Generally gallerists from São Paulo were less keen on artists having a gallery in Rio also, and vice versa, as they perceived it as being the “same market”. Galleries might come to informal agreements in order not to take each other’s collectors (p. 5). Being represented by several galleries was a positive development for artists, though it sometimes led to difficult situations if relations between the gallerists were tense. For artists, it was a way of being more visible and opening up their market potential.

“I think it’s good to have [more] galleries, because it gives some kind of competition and they don’t complain with me. I mean and if they complain, I wouldn’t listen anyway, because they also work with different artist”. (p. 6)

Being part of a gallery also meant operating inside a particular gallery space, a space which gained particular significance when artists envisaged their individual exhibitions there. The physical gallery space was often mentioned, with artists falling for a space or wanting to exhibit in a particular space because they really like it or were inspired by it (p. 38; p. 48; p. 26; p. 47). Gallerists also perceived their space as posing limits or offering opportunities for the evolution of different kinds of works. In particular, the gallery space was experienced as constraining or enabling particular trajectories within the art world, for instance moving from operating as a strictly commercial space to gaining a more museum-like aura (p. 21; p. 28). A Rio-based gallerist explained her transition from a smaller gallery to a larger house, stating that in her former space she could only exhibit smaller works, but that now she had an “exceptional” space where she could show “more institutional works” (p. 3). These works were usually larger scale, more conceptual, and destined for a museum rather than a

private collection, and allowed the gallery to project an aura of disinterestedness in the commercial side of its operation (p. 21; p. 59). Yet, the extent to which gallery exhibitions offered the same kind of visibility and legitimation as institutional spaces was up for debate. Commenting on how he wanted his work to have a greater visibility and to be seen by a larger group of people, one artist commented:

“But I always try to have a, a trajectory for work, not directed towards the gallery and the collector’s home, so I try to give it a trajectory, a trajectory to the work, that is an exhibition, to show the work before it . . . I always try to show the work before it goes to the gallery, to the gallery only to be sold”. (p. 12)

Exhibitions in museums and other art institutions and foundations were experienced as more experimental, so artists pursued these opportunities to “explore the boundaries of art” and extend their work (p. 20) and not have the feeling that they were working and producing solely “for the market” (p. 72, p. 12). “It’s like this—an artist put it—the market is governed by predefined tastes. What I mean is that when somebody wants to buy your work, they want something specific, and you need to give them what they want. In an institution, when somebody comes looking for you, they are looking for an artist, they expect something from you, they want you to be an artist” (p. 33). Similarly, for another São Paulo photographer, it was quite clear that gallery exhibitions and fairs did not provide the opportunity to work with a concept or idea, and that as an artist she needed these other institutional opportunities to do so. On the other hand, “the market pays my relationship with the institutions”, as a Rio-based artist put it (p. 72), emphasizing the symbiotic nature of institutional and gallery-based exhibitions.

Another asset that gallerists discussed, in terms of contributing to their image and vision, was the composition of the “team” of artists they represented (or even “body” p. 26). Especially more established dealers would express the need to have a “consistent” yet diverse group of artists. Developing a consistent “brand” (p. 52) was part of the gallery’s identity-building process, it was not just good for the relationship with the artists, but it helped to facilitate sales by upholding a particular vision while also endowing “prestige” (p. 32). Developing a consistent brand was explained in two ways. On the one hand, gallerists reported working towards achieving a particular vision and diversity within the team, searching to fill gaps in the types of language and media used by the artists (p. 18; p. 32; p. 5). For some gallerists, having a variety of media within their team was “commercially interesting” (p. 44) and part of a matching process, between the identity of the artists and that of the collectors (p. 60). Thus having a clear brand identity and diverse team could be interpreted as part of a gallery’s diversification strategy on two different levels (Peterson 1997): setting oneself apart from the competitors, while also ensuring a varied supply of art. On the other hand, diversification was also framed in a different way; while, gallerists would relate their process of selection and team building, they would also insist on the universal value of good art, irrespective of media, nationality or artistic background (p. 21; p. 28; p. 59). Particularly for more established and market leading galleries, the selection process was less strategic and more driven by a developed sense of what good art was. Indeed, artists paid attention to the quality of the artists standing alongside them in a gallery line up as well. “I liked the gallery”, said one artist, commenting on his departure from a former gallery, “but I did not have much affinity with the other artists they were representing” (p. 26).

Many artists and gallerists reported their experiences of being in an “overheated” market, where high demand for particular artists outpaced their speed of production, and where prices were rising fast, often prior to non-commercial forms of recognition. Some gallerists (p. 51; p. 2) confided that there was a waiting list of three to four people for some artists, resulting in an artist’s work being pre-ordered up to a year and a half in advance, or exhibitions being sold out before the vernissage took place. In particular, some experienced a disproportionate market attention to young artists with no established reputation, who were seen as commanding higher prices than artists from older generations, with a more consolidated and consistent body of work. In contrast with Peterson’s (1997) suggestion that young artists are a liability for dealers, insofar as their reputation is unestablished and prices are marginal, for some economic value could come before legitimated aesthetic value. While success was

not guaranteed for all starting artists, there was a clear premium for those who managed to spark the interest of the market (p. 33; p. 72). Some gallerists were lamenting the hunt for the next market star that some of their counterparts were engaging in, the artists are “coming out of university without a concept in their work. They are selling the frame” (p. 52).

Dealing with the pace of the market demand left some artists feeling that they were working “for the gallery” rather than for themselves, and that they didn’t have time to think, do their research, and develop their art (p. 72; p. 20; p. 12; p. 33). A young artist whose gallery told him they would “take it easy” and introduce him into the market gradually, through group shows, was much appreciative of this attitude (p. 12). Rather than singling out the gallerists as responsible for this, the blame was often apportioned to the absurdity of the whole over-heated “art circuit”. Being in high demand felt that artists had to replicate the same works rather than explore their creativity, as one highly successful young artist who garnered market attention even before he had completed art school explained:

“I have already sold works to people that didn’t even know what the work would look like. “Ah, I am buying! I am buying the next one!” and I am like “Oh my God, crazy people! What if they don’t like it?”. It makes me very nervous because I can’t work with something that already exists. What if I want to kick it, what if I want to tear it up, set fire to it, wee on it, what if I want to give it to someone else, what do I do then? I won’t do it, because the work already exists”. (p. 33)

Artists who experienced such interest in their works felt the urge to take time out (p. 72, p. 33), shunning the system that turned them into a “small factory” (p. 71). Besides such extremes, where artists felt the pressure of high demand, some artists purposefully chose to have a break from being in a gallery, in order to develop their work more freely and independently (p. 48; p. 12); there were also cases of artists feeling they had to self-regulate their own entry into the market, as their work was not “mature” yet when they received their first invitation to join a gallery, deciding to hold back for two years (p. 24). Being in a gallery was sometimes experienced as tainting the work, leading artists to start producing art for the market, rather than having the freedom to experiment and try out new ideas (e.g., p. 48, p. 24, p. 20). Yet rarely did I hear of artists purposefully or explicitly stating that they were changing their work to fit better in a particular market or niche, as has appeared in other studies (Komarova 2018)—though the exhibition schedule, be it in the gallery or at institutions did set the pace of artistic production. In this domain, there was also appreciation for the “management” role gallerists took on; by setting a timeline for exhibitions, they help artists structure their work, keeping them focused on producing art (p. 12; also p. 36).

For a small number of dealers market effervescence brought with it two downsides. The first was the experience that artists, particularly younger artists, were becoming more impatient, wishing to raise prices faster or working for the market rather than for their “poetic research” (p. 32; see also p. 29). This made it harder to separate out the “weeds from the wheat” (p. 32). The second danger was on the side of the buyers. Enthusiasm in the market in combination with weak institutions was seen as a potentially dangerous combination. Without the stabilizing role of institutions, spreading some shared parameters of value, there was a risk of attracting “scalpers” to the art market (p. 29), that is buyers looking for an investment and profit rather than a more serious and long-term commitment to an artist’s trajectory and development. They could create “distortions” in the market by inducing sharp price increases (p. 29), ultimately damaging artistic careers. As a result, gallerists felt the urgency to counter such boom by emphasizing their practices beyond commerce, supporting the cultural valuation of art in society at large.

3.2. Fomenting Culture and the Market

Not surprisingly, most galleries did not perceive of themselves as simply being the threshold to the art market, in the way artists often framed them. In fact, they attributed to themselves a fundamental cultural mission. In a Bourdieusian denial of the economy, one gallerist stated ‘culture is always in

the first place for us' (p. 25). Indeed, most galleries felt that their operation spanned a broad range of activities, from more purely commercial ones to more societally-oriented ones, and that more generally they were "*doing something good for the arts*" (p. 60). On the newer galleries, specialized in younger artists, understood its role as dual: incentivizing culture by focusing on newer artistic generations, while also "fomenting the market" (p. 11; p. 18). For other gallerists, the notion of 'fomenting' often evoked in interviews captured a much broader goal, targeting a wider societal transformation. One Rio gallerist summarized his gallery's goal as "contaminating people with art [. . .] agglutinating more people in support of the richness of art", thus generating an exchange of ideas, educating people, and getting them on board in their societally transformative "cultural and artistic project" (p. 2). Indeed, introducing people to contemporary art and making them see and appreciate its value was often cited as a reason for starting a gallery (p. 25).

Other studies have shown how galleries are regularly engaging in less commercially-oriented practices, as a way to signal their status and disinterestedness in the market (Moulin 1987; Brystyn 1978). Yet, such a cultural mission was particularly salient in the context of the Brazilian art market. It was seen as necessary because of the relatively weak engagement of public cultural institutions and museums in exhibiting and promoting contemporary art, primarily resulting from a lack of financial means. As one gallerist lamented:

"We have amazing artists, we have a commercial scene that is very established nowadays, we have really, really good galleries working like crazy and doing amazing jobs all around the world, but we still don't have the institutional scene that São Paulo, that Brazil deserves". (p. 28)

The weak acquisition power and limited resources of public museums were limiting the institutional exposure of contemporary art in Brazil—a narrative that was present in interviews but also to be heard in the lectures and debates organized during the art fair SP Arte. Though the situation was seen as improving, a long-standing São Paulo gallerist explained how she had stepped into this institutional void with the intention of filling it. She claimed that "museums are a consequence of what we do", given her investments, over the course of decades, in showing more conceptual art. She elaborated:

"we did what the museums were supposed to do. Because [. . .] I had many installations that I did that it was supposed to be on in museums. And now, now it's better, museums started to work hard and do these things, but before that, they only showed very established works". (p. 21)

Fomenting the value of art in society often translated into specific practices and activities that dealers engaged in, within and outside the gallery walls. One São Paulo gallerist discussed how, over the course of the years, she had diversified the activities of her gallery, developing an adjacent cultural centre, in order to "diffuse art", and encourage multi-disciplinarity (p. 14). One more discussed how he had fled the secondary market, which he saw as a purely commercial operation, to engage in contemporary art as a way of "bringing art to the people" and incentivize new artistic production (p. 18). Exhibiting more conceptual, 'institutional work' as previously discussed was not the only way of implementing the vision of the gallery as a cultural space. Galleries regularly organized other types of didactic or entertaining activities, such as lectures, parties or projects targeting deprived neighbourhoods.

"The gallery has, one, another thing that is the link with culture, we organize many lectures here, we have a project with the favela close by, guided tours for the children, we donate books . . . [. . .] This is a space where we provide information, we offer a public service; we need to treat everybody in the same way, we need to be patient, it needs to be open and friendly, we provide information here as well". (p. 61)

Other activities galleries organized were not seen as commercial, yet they served to lure new publics to the gallery, and project the image of the gallery as a lively and happening cultural space in the city. Gallerists engaged in non-commercial activities to “activate” artists and “move” the market, and that this would have ripple effects that will support the market further down the line.

“We did this concert with this artist’s band and projections, and this is like trying to make this space [the gallery] alive. It’s not a commercial strategy, because I am not gonna sell anything, it’s more to make this place alive, we don’t want to have this pace just for ten people, you know. You are two blocks from the metro, which we can bring audience that they are not gonna buy art, but they are buying the concept, because you really believe in art as a cultural form of expression”. (p. 52)

Producing less commercial, more ‘institutional’ exhibitions was seen as being a long-term investment, helping to support the legitimacy of the gallery as a valuable counterpart, even within non-commercial circuits. “I am more concerned about what the institutional side of the art world thinks about the gallery and the artists, than the clients themselves [. . .] because I think if they [curators and critics] also believe and support the work of this artist then the commercial or financial success is like a consequence” (p. 60). Some voiced dissent, fearing that the relationship between market and institutions might become disbalanced. There was a perceived risk that galleries would take over the trailblazing role normally attributed to and embodied by institutions (p. 2).

Fomenting culture in society was not just about reaching out to audiences through activities and events, it was also about getting institutional partners on board to support the value of art and individual artists. The importance of developing and maintaining good relationships and networks with a variety of art world agents was clearly underlined (see [Becker 1982](#)). Artists made a distinction between gallerists with and without good “institutional connections”, the former being a sign of more respected and better galleries (p. 72). Indeed gallerists themselves would assess their own connections relative to those of their counterparts, leading an established gallerist to judge that she didn’t see other galleries “opening a new possibility for these artists” (p. 59). For instance, entering a museum collection or taking part in an exhibition at an art centre or foundation that she had not already considered or achieved herself. Gallerists also experienced the importance of institutional connections, claiming it was often a “political dance” to try to get their own artists into museum collections (p. 13; p. 3). Though many museums had but limited resources to buy new artworks, they were also highly selective with donations (p. 3; p. 14). Institutional collections often relied on donations from private collectors or works harvested during competitions and salons—the latter leaving many artists feeling disgruntled as they felt that receiving a prize did not fully compensate for having to hand over their work for free. Private cultural institutions, such as Itaú Cultural, linked to a bank, had more means to collect and exhibit, and were often praised for their role in making contemporary art accessible to a wider public.

Dealers conveyed that the type of connections they could mobilize for a particular artist needed to be tailored to the stage of an artist’s career (p. 37). As a gallery explained, it’s about “developing a strategy about what would be good for the artists at that moment, based on our experience” (p. 37). Gaining and maintaining prestige for artists and galleries was experienced as a joint endeavour ([Giuffre 1999](#)). It can be a “puzzle” figuring out what the best next step might be—and the gallerist sometimes perceives their role as slowing down the pace, particularly when they feel an artist’s work needs to mature and evolve (p. 37; p. 29). Gallerists and artists can also outgrow each other—or fail to grow at the same pace (fieldnotes; p. 32; p. 9). “When your work starts to mature, you need to be able to count on a gallery that is more. The gallery needs to be in a position to be able to invest more” (p. 9; p. 26; also p. 60). For instance, some artists felt that the level of financial investment a gallery was able and willing to put into her of his production was limiting their growth potential, by stunting their experimentation or simply because they could not afford to start working with more expensive materials (p. 9; p. 26). Artists would also consider joining galleries that were on a par with

their own self-evaluation⁵—or with a gallery that “would grow with you but if it doesn’t, the rhythm is not together, you have to find another gallery” (p. 38). This also meant being with other good artists. The ability of a gallerist to deal with an artist’s development also mattered.

Gallerists also tried to support their artists’ institutional visibility because it helped to consolidate the reputation of the gallery, as well the artist’s own career (p. 11; p. 14). This was done by offering information and support for institutional call for projects and prizes, but also by making sure that museums were well informed about the gallery’s team of artists (p. 11). Such help was more important for starting artists compared to mid-career or established ones, hence gallerists felt they needed to give tailored support to each artist (p. 18). A dealer with decades of experience in the market believed that galleries in Brazil needed to offer more support to artists compared to their counterparts in the USA or Europe because of the incipient nature of the market (p. 25). Speaking about her past experience in a gallery that was heavily committed to emerging, young talent, an artist expressed how she struggled between being grateful for having been given selected, and her assessment that the gallerist “could have handled it if she had management skills, but she couldn’t handle it” (p. 9).

The gallerist’s own social networks opened some doors but not others (see also [Peterson 1997](#); [Giuffrè 1999](#)). Outgrowing a gallery was also experienced in relation to social networks and connections. “It can be that a particular collector wants my work, but because I am in [name of the gallery], he doesn’t buy much there, do you see what I mean?”. One artist was contemplating a gallery switch, as he felt that he was introducing more collectors and extending the gallery’s network much more than what his gallerist was doing for him so that would be a reason to see if somebody else “can do something better, because I am doing for myself enough for my life, my business” (p. 38; p. 72). For gallerists, the notion of growth was experienced in different ways. A relatively young gallery owner told me that her “customer base is starting to gain expertise, you start to understand who your clients are, it’s no longer the guy who is decorating his house. So I don’t need to have only decorative artists, more commercial ones” (p. 3).

3.3. *Educating Collectors in a Growing Market*

Having worked with more established and modern artists, one gallerist spoke about having grown tired of top end of the market as he embarked on this new venture not just to support these artists and help them to grow, but also to be a “cradle of a new market, of a new buyer”, educating people to become collectors at the more affordable end of the market (p. 11). Such notion was echoed by another gallerist, who felt she was supporting “the start of artists’ careers, but also the careers of collectors [. . .] educating, communicating the passion for art” (p. 14; also p. 32).

Gallerists experienced the presence of a new “target group that is searching for something that challenges them. Not just what they know already and just hang on the wall and say “Ah, this is what is correct” (p. 60). Yet in this new role, collectors were seen as relying on the guidance of gallerists.

“We also created a Collector’s Club, members pay an annual fee, they get free lectures here in the gallery, they get [. . .] for instance, if there is a great exhibition at the MAM [Museum of Modern Art in Rio], we take a group, I arrange, I make arrangements with the museum curator, I take the group, we take a guided tour with the curator, explaining the exhibition, they get special deals when buying in the gallery. [. . .] These are usually newcomers, people who are just getting started [with collecting], who is hungry for knowledge, wants to understand, to study, it’s more these kind of people”. (p. 61)

In the end, the gallerist explained that well-informed customers were good business too.

Some gallerists felt that there was less of a dichotomy between works that were commercially oriented and those destined for a more institutional trajectory, as a new type of collector was emerging,

⁵ “I want to be in a good gallery, because what I am doing is evaluating [cf. elevating] the gallery I know that, I believe that. So I am not going to evaluate [elevate] anywhere where I don’t think it’s good, you know?” (p. 38).

with an interest in “institutional” works: “a year ago, at ArtRio [Rio’s international art fair], I exhibited a work that was 100% institutional, I sold it to an institution. But collectors were also expressing an interest [. . .] there are now many collections that are opening up and have the space for institutional works” (p. 2). In other words, they saw collectors as taking on the cultural and educational mission that institutions were often struggling to fulfil, due to lack of funds that is investing in art and making it visible and available to a wider public in their own private exhibition spaces and museums (p. 14). Collectors were also increasingly responsive to more institutionally oriented exhibitions and shows. Such shows were seen a strengthening confidence in the gallery, and potentially leading to future transactions.

“I always tell my artists: let’s go, let’s do this institutional thing. Let’s do it because it strengthens us a lot, right? An institutional trajectory is very very important. Because the gallery is a commercial space. So if you have a strong institutional side, even because, for the buyer who arrives at the gallery, who sees all this trajectory, he will be more motivated, more confident”. (p. 44)

Yet, it could also be confusing for collectors. “I think [it] is a problem that all the shows, they are very museum-like foundation-like, and we are a commercial gallery, so people don’t understand, don’t believe we can sell the things, so this is something that we struggle with (p. 52). Investing in institutional exhibitions was a “statement” that the gallery wanted to make, that would pay off eventually. Another gallerist struggled with the impression that “meet the artists” sessions and curatorial discussions during *finissages* parties by saying that it felt like she was “disguising” her commercial nature. “Meet the artists sessions should take place in a museum”, not in a gallery context—yet she felt compelled to organize these activities in her space (p. 3).

This was seen as particularly important in Brazil, given not many museums had the funds to buy art (p. 2). Moreover, collectors had changed compared to the earlier decades of the contemporary art market: “they understand, they go to classes, they read, they write” concluded one gallerist, who also recalled how she was seen as “crazy” twenty years previously (p. 25). Another gallerist went so far as to compare collectors to museums:

“We are not dealing with people that buy art, we’re dealing with collectors, so like, we’re only dealing with collectors. So it’s like 95% of what we sell are either to institutions or to collectors that are building collections that are institutional collections. So it’s the same thing. Lots of my collectors have their own curators, or their own boards, or their own way of developing the collections, so I wouldn’t separate at all [an institutional from a market trajectory]”. (p. 28)

Collectors were seen as “guardians” of art, taking care of it temporarily, up to the point when life’s circumstances would make this guardianship no longer possible (p. 28). Yet, not all collectors were seen as knowing or understanding their responsibility in the art market, requiring guidance and assistance from the gallerists. “People buying and they don’t wanna lend for museums, because they think they are more important than the institutions. And it’s our responsibility here to change those minds” (p. 59). This also meant making the collectors “partners of this institution which is the gallery and not only selling and say “Oh, bye bye!”. How can we follow very close those artists, that they are buying, how can they be responsible with us, because they are part of it. I cannot do it alone. I pretty much believe that they have to [. . .] embrace this project” (p. 59). Established gallerists found that building up the collectors’ “commitment” to a joint cultural mission was fundamental to their work (p. 59). One particular gallery believed it was their responsibility to change people’s attitude. Among the collectors who were praised over and over again for what they had done for contemporary art: recurring names were those of Bernardo Paz, industrialist and founder of the private contemporary art museum Inhotim, José Olympo, Setubal and Figueiredo Ferraz, who opened a private museum in Riberão Preto.

4. Discussion

Previous studies on the development art world have shown how the presence of dedicated institutions, patrons and a diffused intellectualizing discourse have supported the diffusion of organizational and ideological foundations supporting the wider societal valuation of particular art forms (Baumann 2001, 2007). Moreover, in established art markets, gaining and maintaining prestige requires matching resources and networks (Peterson 1997). This paper shows how galleries and artists deal with uncertainty related to the experience of market incipience, by diversifying the activities they engage in, framing the scope and mission of the gallery as profoundly societally transformative, with the discursive goal of giving contemporary art its rightful place. Indeed, when the networks and relationships that are characteristic of art worlds are in development, the potential of institutions and collectors to lend credibility to the aesthetic and cultural value of art is yet to be consolidated. This research adds to our understanding of art markets and to the growing empirical richness of case studies outside the traditional art centres by zooming in to the experiences of artists and gallerist operating in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, at a time of market ebullience.

Artists and gallerists alike mobilised the notion of being outside the market to stress the place of art in society: Artists in a more Bourdieusian sense, distance themselves from the possibility that they might be motivated by economic gains, and seek to enhance their symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1993), while gallerists champion their role as non-commercial cultural promoters (Brystyn 1978) and enablers of a well-functioning art market, where collectors and institutions fulfil their role. Respondents reflected on the incipience of museums and cultural institutions in São Paulo and Rio, due to the limited financial resources available to build prestigious collections. The perceived weakness of the institutional landscape posed a challenge; how to sustaining the legitimacy of the commercial circuit in the absence of strong institutional resources and independent intellectualizing discourse? Dealers in particular related a number of solutions to such constraints, developing and engaging in practices and activities beyond commerce, justified as diffusing the value of art in society. This paper showed how and why galleries function as market hybrids in an emerging market, combining the more common functions of representation, exhibition and sales with more didactic and institutional-making facilitation. Moreover, dealers and artists acknowledged that achieving the market's potential required educating collectors to embrace and take responsibility for 'fomenting' the value of art and culture in society. Therefore, the paper investigated the ways art dealers frame their role not just as cultural promoters, but also as facilitators and enablers, guiding other art market agents to understand and take up their responsibilities relating to the promotion of contemporary art as a marketable and cultural product. The notion of shared responsibility for the promotion of art in society was mobilized to garner support for the gallery's goals to place art where it belongs, that is in a public (or private) museum or cultural institution setting.

The hybrid nature of gallery practices offers fresh insights into art dealers' role in market emergence, in particular revealing how local contexts shape the nature of a globalized institution such as the contemporary art gallery and its space (see also Sooudi 2016). The paper shows how practices spanning the art and commerce boundary are not simply related to wider dynamics in cultural fields, but are also to local socio-cultural activation mechanisms. That is to the way local contexts positively or negatively shape the development of the art market to fit particular contingencies (Komarova and Velthuis 2018). As we see in this paper, the experience of a weak legitimating institutional field does not exclusively hinder market consolidation practices, but actually inspires and motivates art dealers to step into this vacuum and attribute to themselves a wider variety of functions within the market. Yet fruitful further research could fill gaps in our understanding of how such efforts are perceived by cultural institutions and collectors, as well as how they understand the boundaries of their responsibilities in fomenting art in society. Moreover, this paper advocates for further qualitative studies in lesser known local art markets, addressing inequalities in attention to developments outside the more traditional centres and helping to further unpack the salience of local contexts processes of economic and cultural valorization of contemporary art.

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