

EVOLVE FOR ART'S SAKE!

Democratic Art Communities:
A new business model
for the visual art market

BY VISUAL ART TRADER

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Contents

1. Preface	5
2. Introduction	7
3. Democratising the emerging and primary visual art markets	9
Introduction	9
What is Relationalism?	9
Relationalism's current influence on visual art production	9
Relationalism's current influence on the visual art world	10
The future influence of Relationalism on the visual art world	11
The future influence of Relationalism on visual art production	14
Challenging the artistic integrity of Relationalism	15
How the fear of money stifles the patronage of Relationalism and the growth of democracy in art	16
Relationalism's battle with the influence of hype	17
Valuing Relational Art	18
Conclusion	23
4. VAT's style categories	24
Definition of the Visual Arts	24
The four visual art styles	24
Distinguishing the borders between the visual art styles	25
The effect the four visual art styles have on categorising art according to history	26
Creating new models to define visual art style	26
VAT's Visual Art Style Wheel	28
Clarifying the difference between Abstract Art and Representational Art	30
Examples of the visual style categorisation system at work	32
Conclusion	33
5. VAT's services and benefits	34
A. Artists	34
B. Venues	34
C. Collectors	34
6. Conclusion	35
7. Page of thanks	37
8. Footnotes	38

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1. Preface

"Standing tall on the roof of the world, yet again, we hurl our defiance at the stars"

The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism, F.T.Marinetti, 1909

EVOLVE FOR ART'S SAKE! THIS IS THE MANIFESTO FOR DEMOCRATIC ART COMMUNITIES; IT STATES WHY AND HOW THERE WILL BE GREATER DEMOCRACY IN THE VISUAL ARTS.

'Democratic Art Communities' is a term pioneered by Visual Art Trader (VAT) to describe egalitarian art organisations that promote the sale of visual art without the controlling influence of external forces. Democratic art communities offer an evolved business model for developing new growth in the emerging and primary visual art markets, beyond where the existing gallery model is able to. Democratic art communities attract new collectors alienated by the gallery system, and consequently increase the opportunities for more artists to develop their careers. For emerging artists and new collectors democratic art communities represent an affordable and accessible stepping stone into the art world, helping them onto the first rung of the visual art market ladder. The EVOLVE FOR ART'S SAKE! manifesto isn't a theory; Visual Art Trader is a working example of a democratic art community actively evolving the visual arts.

Chapter 2 highlights some of the current visual art market's failings and why greater democracy might be the solution.

Chapter 3 goes into more detail about Democratic Art Communities and VAT. It explains how democratising the emerging and primary visual art markets will not only change society's perception and appreciation of the visual arts but how it will also influence the direction and development of visual art production.

Chapter 4 explains how we came to define our new style categories. Using the internet to database art for the public's consumption meant creating a new more democratic categorisation system for visual style that did not require an in depth knowledge of historical visual art movements. VAT's new style categories democratises the visual arts by allowing the public to easily find art based on what they see not on what they know. We hope it becomes the industry standard.

Chapter 5 lists the various services and benefits VAT offer our three user types: Artists, Venues and Collectors.

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2. Introduction

"And I say: That no torture chamber of the academies will withstand the days to come. Forms move and are born, and we are forever making new discoveries. And what we discover must not be concealed. And it is absurd to force our age into the old forms of a bygone age."

Suprematist Manifesto, Kasimir Malevich, 1916

THE PROBLEM: And we say: "That no torture chamber of the galleries will withstand the days to come..." The gallery system is too old and ill equipped to develop the massive potential for new growth within the emerging and primary visual art markets.

Graduates in Fine Art have risen 40% from 13,883 in 1996 to 19,450 in 2009.¹

Since 2005 an average of only 6.1% of fine art BA under graduates managed to start a career as a fine artist,² yet in those same years 61% of those studying in the creative arts achieved an upper second or first at BA level.³

10.2 million People (26% of English population) would consider buying work by a living artist, of which 6.1 million people have yet to make their first purchase. This suggests that there is a potential to more than double the current size of the market of buyers in England.⁴

Of the 1170 art retail outlets in 2004, 80% were commercial dealers, 9% independent non-profit galleries, 7% publicly funded galleries and 1% art fairs. This leaves Open Studio Events, which make up the remaining 3%, and represent the only retail outlets that aren't influenced by the gallery business model.⁵

84% of existing and potential buyers of contemporary art are outside London, leaving just 16% within London.⁶ Yet over 37% of outlets that sell contemporary art are based in London.⁷

THE CAUSE: The business model for an art gallery is too expensive and too exclusive to support the emerging and primary visual art markets.

High overheads and limited space restricts galleries to exhibiting small numbers of expensive high profit yielding artists. The prohibitively high prices restrict the number of collectors to only the wealthiest.

The variety and choice of art on show is limited by the tastes of the dealer and the tastes of those that already buy the art.

The Subscription System employed by the Gallery Business Model to manufacture and maintain an artist's reputation⁸ alienates audiences through exclusivism⁹, elitist art language and irregular valuing patterns.

THE SOLUTION: Democratic art communities such as Visual Art Trader (VAT) provide a new more economically viable business model and an alternative artistic approach to develop the emerging and primary visual art markets.

- No sales commissions.
 - User-friendly art language that categorises art according to what the public see, not what they know (please see chapter 4: VAT's style categories).
 - Egalitarian selection policy, all genres, mediums and styles of visual arts represented.
 - Give artists access to the public's artwork search patterns and statistics.
 - No middleman, allow collectors direct access to artists.
 - Regional, National and International Studio Open Days.
 - Take the art to the public and engage with them at local level on a national scale. Art displays in friendly and informal non-commercial exhibition venues such as bistros, cafes and bars.
- THE RESULT:** The emerging and primary visual art markets expand becoming more approachable, accessible and affordable.
- The diversity, breadth and depth of art available increases, appealing to a larger, currently unrepresented, collector base.

- Artworks are affordably priced by artists, encouraging new emerging collectors to buy.
- A democratic and naturally regulated valuation process emerges, influenced by consumer demand.
- Stronger personal relationships and friendships develop between collectors and artists based on communication, understanding, and trust.
- The teaching of traditional fine art and craft based skills will be reintroduced at degree level as students seek a more rounded and practical art education.
- Through the use of artwork search patterns and statistics, a relational aesthetic may start to develop in artists' working methods.
- The public's self-reliance will increase as they learn to trust their own judgments and learn to express their own personal artistic taste.
- The public's perception of the visual arts changes. Hopefully art will no longer be collected for investment and preservation, but for the enjoyment of personal expression and consumption.
- Freed from the isolated confines of the art world's institutionalised white walls, visual art exhibitions will no longer need to critique the role of the gallery and art's relation to it, instead liberated to explore more original and useful avenues of thought in the public sphere.
- The importance of an artwork's dialogue with the past will find a new perspective as the value of artworks become increasingly judged on the balance between the object's inherent value, its current social value and its artistic value.
- A greater integration of the visual arts into civic life, contributing to the growth of wellbeing, democratic representation, cultural vibrancy, and quality of life, all social goals associated with an "Expressive Life".¹⁰

Galleries are over one hundred and fifty years old. They are old fashioned and their role in the emerging and primary visual art market should be consigned to art history. Visual art should be accessible, affordable and approachable to the public sphere. This is one of the original founding philosophies from the age of enlightenment and one that galleries have been unable to fulfil in today's economic climate because their business model makes them slaves to money and us slaves to their artistic whims. It is the responsibilities of today's democratic art communities and its artists to reignite the public sphere's passion with visual art by adopting the ideology of the enlightenment. With the help of our manifesto EVOLVE FOR ART'S SAKE! hopefully the responsibilities of democratic art communities will be better understood and in turn taken more seriously.

3. Democratizing the emerging and primary visual art markets

The roles of Relationalism and Democratic Art Communities

"As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master. This expresses my idea of democracy. Whatever differs from this, to the extent of the difference, is no democracy"

Abraham Lincoln, *Definition of Democracy*, 1858

Introduction

The emerging and primary visual art markets are currently based on an exclusive system. A small group of dealers (galleries) select a small group of artists, to sell small groups of artworks, to a small group of collectors whom are fortunate enough to be able to afford the artworks. Unfortunately the system not only excludes the majority of the public from participation but it also excludes the majority of emerging artists, preventing artistic development and expansion. The new visual art movement relationalism and democratic art communities such as Visual Art Trader (VAT) are trying to change this by establishing a more democratic visual art world.

What is Relationalism?

Relationalism is not just an individual style of art production it is a new movement that covers all aspects of the visual art world from art production to art sales, whose governing philosophy is to challenge the art world to meet the public's needs.

Relational Art as first developed and defined by Nicolas Bourriaud in his book of 1998 *Esthétique Relationnelle (Relational Aesthetics)* is "a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space."

Relational aesthetics are based on public participation and the success or failure of the relational artwork is reliant upon the public's involvement. For example Rirkrit Tiravanija cooks meals for gallery goers, Olafur Eliasson's *The Weather Project* needed the public to 'populate' the artwork and Mirosław Balka's *How It Is* needed the public to get lost inside his artwork. There are some theories on why relational aesthetics in visual art are relevant. The Marxist cultural theory suggests that ordinary people are hooked on consumerism¹¹ and that relational artists try to break this down by offering free food, a free

indoor beach party or a bout of claustrophobia. Not a convincing theory, the artists are paid and nowadays most permanent exhibitions are free to visit. Then there is the anthropologist's view that relational art can be used as a social experiment to help us learn about people as groups based upon how they choose to physically interact with the relational artwork. Again not very convincing, spectators' physical responses may vary when interacting with an artwork as part of a group compared to as individuals, but the anthropological view of relational art limits the spectators to only physical interaction and only with three dimensional artworks, it doesn't account for other forms of human relations and interactions, it ignores art works in two dimensions and ignores other social contexts within the art world such as art sales. What makes relational aesthetics relevant in visual art is the influence of the public's involvement has over the production of artworks, and then in turn over the art world that supports them. This is the movement of relationalism and it is the starting point for the emergence of democracy in visual art.

Relationalism's current influence on visual art production

Every year the Turner Prize at the Tate Britain attracts huge amount of criticism from the public and most of it is aimed at the conceptual art works. An artwork is conceptual when the balance of its artistic value is disproportionately in favour of the idea/theory leaving the empirical object and creative process superfluous. Commonly it is the idea/theory behind conceptual artworks that leave viewers alienated and confused. However conceptual artworks that use Relational Aesthetics are more popular with the public because the theory behind each artwork is not as important to them as the actual censoring experience gained from having been a part of the artwork.

Rirkrit Tiravanija cooks meals for gallery goers: good food, in an exciting venue with like-minded souls is always going to appeal, and the fact that they are part of an artwork starts to diminish by comparison. Olafur Eliasson's *The Weather Project* was an interesting sight in its own right, but what really brought it alive were the public lying on the floor of the Tate Modern's turbine hall as if on a beach, basking in the strange glow of the artificial sun while admiring each others watery reflections on the ceiling. Mirosław Balka's *How It Is* needs the public to get lost inside his artwork and to relay what it was like to experience the physical sensations of claustrophobia. In these three examples of relational art the artwork object is not as important as the public's physical interaction and reaction.

As a result of incorporating Relational Aesthetics into their artworks conceptual artists, whether consciously or not, have invented pop-conceptualism. Pop-conceptualists are currently the only genre in the visual arts to be openly exploring relational aesthetics.

Relationalism's current influence on the visual art world

It is the growth of relational aesthetics in all aspects of the art world, not just in the process of art production, that shows the breadth of relationalism and the level of democracy currently attained in visual arts.

In 2004 The Arts Council of England published a report it had commissioned by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre to investigate "how to cultivate the art market" called *Taste Buds*. *Taste Buds* aimed to explore the extent to which individuals in England buy or have the inclination to buy contemporary art for their homes and to address three questions:

1. How to enhance and increase sales of innovative contemporary art and private commissions through diverse distribution points

2. How to help artists to become more entrepreneurial in their engagement with the marketplace

3. How to expand the audience for contemporary work

Since *Taste Buds* the Arts Council have to set up Own Art in 2005, a scheme that is designed to help the public buy art with interest free loans up to £2,000. The arts council with the backing of the national lottery fund has also invested heavily in public projects since 1994. From individual art works such as *The Angel of the North* by Antony Gormley to the redevelopment of the Gateshead Quays and in particular The Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art.

Political think tanks such as Demos are starting to question the role of democracy in art. *Democratic Culture* by John Holden published by Demos in 2008 directly questions the lack of public involvement in the arts suggesting three examples of exclusivism are the cause 1) the malign experts who "bamboozle, patronize and exclude the public", 2) The cultural snob who must reject the uninitiated from their social group in order assert their cultural superiority and 3) The avant-gardes who "define themselves in oppositional terms... they must either alienate the public or withdraw from contact with the public". Demos' solution for cultural democracy is that art should adopt the characteristics of a political democracy: universalism, pluralism, equality, transparency and freedom. Demos have created a programme called *The Cultural Age* aimed at addressing the problems above.

There have been many initiatives by private individuals and groups to adopt the ethics of relational aesthetics and to engage more directly with the public. Art Below founded in 2006 by Ben Moore stands out for its efforts to get visual art to the public via its use of poster billboards on the

London Underground: "Art should be, and in some senses already is everywhere, and we believe that it should be for everybody. The gallery often has a stigma, leading people to perceive art as a closed door, a private establishment, and suggests an exclusive forum, which only certain people are encouraged to participate. Today's urban people lead increasingly busy lives; they often do not have the time to appreciate the value of art. We bring change by taking the art to them. We show art in a new, public context".

In 2007 the Faculty of Fine Arts at Madrid's Complutense University started a course in Urban Art. The course teaches artists to step away from the traditional forms of graffiti such as tags (artist's name) and bombing (the name as a mural) which primarily seek validation from other artists, and move into Street Art, which is designed for the public's consumption and approval. These artworks can be anything from posters on walls to mock road signs.

During the twenty years spanning the start of third millennium we see new initiatives from the art market whether conscience or not to use relational aesthetics to help re-engage with the public. Galleries are exhibiting more fashionable and popular artists to meet the public's needs. Previously shunned by the art establishment the hugely popular Street Artist Banksy is an excellent example of galleries pandering to public taste. More and more art fairs have sprung up, none more evocative of this new drive to engage with the public than the Affordable Art Fair - Nothing attracts buyers more than appealing to their wallets with a bargain; it is the simplest of marketing techniques.

In conjunction with the Arts Council and The Art Fund, the media has been exploring relational aesthetics and the public's ability to participate. In May 2009 Channel 4's *Big Art* television series followed seven different projects over four years to see what happened when the public commissions

art. *Big Art* is a great but very ambitious project that throws the public in at the deep. At best if the public succeeds it is accredited to the help they received from the art experts, and at worst if they fail it allows the art world to say that the relational aesthetics doesn't work because of the public's involvement. For relational aesthetics to become integrated into the art world the public needs to be educated, they need to learn how to walk before they are expected to run. The public should start at the beginning buying small artworks for their own private living spaces and then moving onto larger commissions as their experience and confidence grows.

The performing arts' are an excellent example of the continuing influence of relational aesthetics and its misuse. In The Eurovision Song Contest the public's decision-making is influenced more by cultural, political and geographical differences than by the merit of the artistic content. This makes a mockery of the performing arts and of relational aesthetics because 'serious' artists become discouraged from participating for fear of being tarnished by association. In an effort to curb the influence of the public, experts are employed on television programs such as *Strictly Come Dancing*, *X-factor* and other interactive 'talent' shows. For the movement of Relationalism to develop in the visual arts it must maintain its integrity. When appraising an artwork the public must judge it by the artistic standards they desire, not the opinions of others.

The future influence of Relationalism on the visual art world

The Arts Council wants 'to get more art to more people in more places.'¹² The Arts Council is unable to become directly involved in the emerging and primary visual art markets due to its position as a charity. However to help others improve the visual art world the Arts Council commissioned a report in 2004 by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre

Taste Buds: how to cultivate the art market. The key findings of this report highlight a number of problems with the current emerging and primary visual art markets and the art eco-system, which were then laid out in the Arts Council's ten-year plan *Turning Point* (2006). Here are four examples:

- "The way in which contemporary art is sold, rather than the art itself, can deter the potential market."
- "The public responds to challengers or studios which have offered new retail models."
- "Conventions within the visual arts sector are also responsible for the underdevelopment of the market rather than alleged philistine tendencies on the part of the public."
- "There is a resistance on the part of many artists and dealers to selling critically engaged art to domestic buyers since it makes no contribution to the subscription process."

The Arts Council's research has made it clear that something needs to be done to improve the art world. As a consequence of trying to bring greater democracy to the visual arts relationalism and democratic art communities such as VAT are directly tackling these issues.

VAT is a democratic arts community for artists, exhibition venues and collectors. VAT's effort to attract more public into the emerging and primary visual art market is helping to develop relationalism and lead to greater democracy in visual art. Traditionally the gallery was the main source of primary visual art for the public, but the gallery controlled everything: supply, demand, prices and taste. VAT takes the power of the art sale away from the art world and gives it to the public. Through VAT the public have far greater access to more artists, whom they can now contact

directly, negotiate prices, arrange viewings and commission artworks with.

A gallery and dealer's business model is based on sustaining rarity and exclusivity; one method they use to restrict the expansion of the visual art market is through spuriously high prices. VAT artists are more affordable to the public because VAT is financed by the artist's membership fees and not by sales commissions, art can be sold directly to the public for its true value without the inflated price tag that is associated with galleries and their commission based system. The public trust VAT because VAT does not profit from the sale of artworks, VAT does not offer an opinion on the value of an artist because VAT has nothing to gain from it. VAT is also totally impartial in its selection policy allowing the public greater choice and artist's greater opportunity. All genres, mediums and styles are welcomed as well as both professional and amateur artists. With an egalitarian selection policy, consumer demand and membership fees play an important role in up holding the quality, integrity and democracy of the VAT artist community.

A lack of knowledge has restricted the public's access to art in the past. Galleries have exploited the "alleged philistine tendencies" of the public to enhance their limited stock's reputations through intimidating, often pretentious art language. VAT has developed four simple visual style categories that do not require an in depth knowledge of historical art movements. VAT's new style categories allow the public to easily find art based on what they see not on what they know (please read Chapter 4: *VAT's Style Categories*). With easier access more members of the public will be able to explore and learn about art.

The French theorist Yves Michaud argued that in the future one of the consequences of relational aesthetics will be that more and more artistic content will appear in our everyday lives from over-designed household goods to

interactive Nintendo Wii computer games and that more and more everyday practices will enter the art gallery like eating Thai food, graffiti and riding Carsten Höller's slide in the Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern. In the future it will be more and more difficult to tell what is a social interaction or something that we use, and what is a work of art.¹³ Blurring the borders between home and gallery through the integration of visual art into the public's everyday lives is not a new phenomenon. The Societe Anonyme's was founded by Katherine Dreier, Marcel Duchamp, and Man Ray in 1920 in New York. Its most ambitious curatorial undertaking was the 1926-27 *International Exhibition of Modern Art* held at the Brooklyn Museum. Dreier organised the show with 'four quaint small rooms' (a parlour, a library, a dining room and a bedroom) in the corners of four of the larger galleries within the museum. The four rooms were furnished by the nearby department store Abraham & Straus specialising in new traditional styled furniture for the budget minded. Dreier was a firm believer in marrying art and the home. Her own homes The Haven and Laurel Manor were traditionally furnished and yet on the walls hung works by Leger, Brancusi, Ernst and Duchamp. Before The Societe Anonyme blurred the boundaries between gallery and home, artists had already been exhibiting in public spaces. The most infamous (probably because it sold nothing!) was *Paintings by the Impressionist and Synthetist Group* of 1889, better known as *The Volpini Exhibition*, after the café proprietor's name. Gauguin and Schuffenecker's circle of friends organised the exhibition in the Grand Café des Beaux-Arts opposite the Palais des Beaux Art's *Exposition Universelle* to which their art had been refused entry. A more successful example is Any Warhol's first exhibitions in New York's Serendipity café during the mid 1950's at which, according to the proprietor Steven Bruce, he managed to sell his early "blotted line" drawings.

VAT is continuing the trend of integrating art into the public's every day lives and in so doing is helping to fulfil Yves Michaud's prophecy for relational aesthetics. The late 19th early 20th century tradition of exhibiting artworks in bars, cafes and bistros has been revived and improved by VAT with more venues, better organized shows and greater unity, ultimately leading to direct interaction with the public on a much larger scale. This form of public exhibition is supported by conclusions reached at The Sky Arts Artichoke Salon Series' June 2010 debate at the Tate Modern: "The Politics of Cultural Disruption". It was the panel's opinion that temporary public displays of art are often far more effective and efficient at engaging with the public than permanent displays. The debate also criticised expensive large individual public art projects and suggested that engaging with the public through many more, smaller localised community projects might be a more effective use of resources. In relationalism visual art goes to the public and the public is given greater access to view the art. Access to view an artist's work in their studios is currently restricted by galleries who are protecting their business model. VAT encourages its artists to build relations directly with collectors and to open up their studios (by appointment or at set times) to the public. VAT's goal is for its community of artists to collaborate on synchronised multi-studio open days/weekends at set times through out the year.

In times of economic downturns the influence of the public grows as all markets try and capture ever-decreasing numbers of customers. Within the visual arts the influence of relational aesthetics have been slowly increasing for two decades; this current economic downturn 'The Credit Crunch' and the government cuts in public spending could be the catalyst required for relationalism and VAT to grow and for a new era of democratic culture to be born. With the middle to high end of the visual art market stalling there is the chance for the

public to re-address the balance and develop new rungs on the visual art market ladder. Democratic art communities such as VAT could be the missing first rung, a stepping-stone helping both new collectors and emerging artists into the primary visual art market.

The future influence of Relationalism on visual art production

A viewer's physical participation in pop-conceptual art is what defines it as relational art. For the genres of visual arts that work in two dimensions (and three dimensions) the public's participation can no longer be 'physical', but rather participation based on 'influence', influence over an artist's creative direction. The VAT website's statistical feedback allows artists to analyse the public demand for visual art, from artwork sizes, to spending patterns, from preferred content to preferred styles. Artists can adjust their artworks accordingly to cater for public demand and reflect the cultural mood.

With the growth of Relationalism and the influence of the public sphere over visual art production there is a possibility that imitative visual art may return to prominence. Artists shouldn't be too quick to dismiss this as retrogressive, because maybe there are stronger, more profound forces at work. The public's most common criticisms of abstract and conceptual art is that it is easy to make, but why do they think this? In their defence the art world accuses the public of ignorance. This maybe true, but it still doesn't explain why it looks easy to make. Entropy could explain why this tick of human nature exists. An artwork that relies on imitation such as the Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci (c.1503–1519) could be said to have low entropy. That is because there are very few ways you could rearrange the constituent parts of an imitational artwork before you start to change the structure of the artwork from imitation to abstraction. By contrast

an abstract artwork such as No.5 by Jackson Pollock (1948) could be said to have high entropy. That is because there are many more ways of rearranging the constituent parts of an abstract artwork before it chances upon imitation. The concept of entropy is defined by the second law of thermodynamics which says that everything tends from order to disorder, from low entropy to high entropy. Entropy explains the passage of time, in the past there was more order and in the future there will be less order. It could be that as a condition of life we are attracted to low entropy. By continuing to assert low entropy, life brings more order and existence into the universe, perhaps in an effort to delay its inevitable path into chaos, disorder and eventual destruction. Therefore it might just be that human nature is pre-programmed by life to favour imitative visual art. It will be the job of Relational Artists to explore this possibility.

It will be very difficult to define anyone style or subject matter that might emerge in visual art as a result of relationalism. It is likely that whatever pattern of influence reaches a popular majority will attract the consensus that it is 'beautiful'. Beauty can be seen in many different forms but the one thing agreed upon is that for beauty to be recognised it needs the common consensus of a popular majority. The 18th Century philosopher Immanuel Kant believes that the search for beauty is really a search for consensus. Lovers of beauty, wrote Kant, are 'suitors for agreement'. Judgments of beauty imply the search for a community of likeminded souls.¹⁴ The beneficial side effect of relationalism will be its ability to highlight cultural variations of beauty within individual societies and increase global sub-cultural unity. Relational art that enjoys a majority in one culture might actually be in the minority when smaller sub-cultures are unified globally, what Nicolas Bourriaud refers to as Altermodern.

Challenging the artistic integrity of Relationalism

Opponents of Relationalism will brand it commercialism repackaged, claiming that art is selling its integrity for the sake of commercial gain: Profiteering in other words. Commercialism and relationalism are very different. Commercialism is the exploitation of a single artwork for economic gain through reproductions. Relationalism is the influence of an individual or group over an artist's creation of a unique artwork. Karl Marx once declared that "the writer naturally must make money in order to live and write, but he should not under any circumstances live and write in order to make money." In the pursuit of introspection it appears visual artists have taken Marx's statement to an untenable extreme. At some point all art has to court outside influences. For an anti-relational artwork to successfully maintain its 'integrity' it cannot be sold, as that would constitute profiteering, but would have to be gifted away. Unfortunately to be totally anti-relational and uphold its integrity no one must like the gift because for an artwork to be liked means that it must have succumbed to the outside influence of other people's tastes and therefore relational aesthetics, instead of devoting itself completely to the introspection of the artist. If an artist fears that their artwork might be liked, then to maintain its integrity the artwork must never be seen. Artists that like to live in the real world and like to be a part of society, appreciate that on some level their art must be influenced by relational aesthetics.

In no particular order here are five very simplified examples showing potential levels of involvement an artist could have with relationalism.

- Artists ignore relationalism and continue to create visual art for galleries, relying on the gallery to build their reputations.

- Artists continue to produce the art they want but sell it through online democratic art communities such as VAT, turning their backs on the gallery system.
- Artists accept commissions from collectors.
- Artists become proactive and go after collectors. Using customer usage statistics from democratic art communities, artists create art that reflects and develops cultural trends.
- Artists could ignore creativity and invention, instead appropriate other artist work with their own elucidations and then repeatedly reproduce it. This is still visual art and would interestingly reflect cultural tastes, but this extreme interpretation of relational aesthetics will undoubtedly be met in the majority with criticism.

Embracing relational aesthetics does not mean that the creativity, expression of individuality and experimentation in art has to die; exploring relational aesthetics in visual art would require all of these attributes and still more yet to be explored. Relationalism needs to convince artists that earning a living from art does not jeopardize their integrity, it is not 'selling out', but is in fact a method of expanding and developing the boundaries of visual art's potential. The realm of relational aesthetics is a radical step for visual art and it is where today's revolutionary artists should be looking to explore. Artists that wish to ignore relationalism should not be afraid to do so, in a democratic culture there will always be large sections of the public who will judge non-relational art worthy of their merit, however those artists should be aware that they can no longer expect the same levels of support and patronage from within the art world as relational artists might get from the public outside it.

How the fear of money stifles the patronage of Relationalism and the growth of democracy in art

The current emerging and primary visual art markets are structured around galleries and dealers. This system restricts the public to buying art from a reduced pool of recommended artists. Galleries do not recommend art based on taste, as taste is a personal opinion, they generally recommend art on whether it will be a good investment or not. To maintain their position of power and perceived knowledge within the art market galleries artificially increases an artist's reputations by encouraging more collectors to buy the artist, making the artist more popular and driving prices up and so on, in a worryingly similar pattern to how pyramid schemes operate. Buying art for investment means that collectors are buying what someone else likes, not what they like. Even if collectors ignore a gallery's advice, they are still being dictated to by the galleries limited selection of recommended stock. The galleries' power within the primary visual art market artificially manipulates the artistic direction of art and culture. The higher up the gallery pecking order you go the worse it gets. The international galleries effectively form an oligopoly, influencing each others tastes and fashions. Where you would expect to find diversity you find conformity, not a very good example to set for aspiring galleries and artists. The people producing visual art and the people consuming visual art should dictate a democratic course for visual art. Unfortunately galleries are based on a very inefficient and expensive business model, which makes the influence of money unavoidable in a primary visual art market dominated by galleries. Therefore the primary visual art market and ultimately the artists, whether consciously or not, will cater to a galleries needs. The horrible truth is that money is the single strongest

common denominator influencing visual art at the moment, from education and creativity to marketing and buying patterns, it permeates all aspects of the visual art world. The visual arts unwillingness to acknowledge and address the problem of money allows it to maintain its unnecessary influence.

The artist's fear of money dates back to the birth of modernism in Paris at the 'Salon des Refuses' of 1863. Prior to 1863 a public minority of wealthy patrons dictated artistic direction. Artists would exhibit at the Paris Salon to advertise their abilities. Prior to the formation of the Paris Salon in 1748 an even smaller minority of even wealthier patrons such as the Royal Courts and the Church controlled artistic direction. In 1863 with such artworks as Edouard Manet's oil painting 'Dejeuner sur l'herbe' artists fought convention and took control of all aspects of the art world. Through the exploration and mastery of their mediums artists were able to establish their artistic superiority over their patrons, proving to them that it was they (the artist) who should make the artistic decisions; it was they who were pushing the boundaries of skill and knowledge in art, it was they who should decide what, how and why an artwork should be created. Modernism wrestled the power away from a ruling minority of established wealthy art patrons and gave it to the artists. For 147 years visual art has been on a voyage of self-discovery, exploring with great success all the limitations and possibilities of its different mediums. With great excitement and fascination the public has watched on as visual art has obsessively pursued its goal. The knowledge gained from visual art's introspection has been massively beneficial to both itself and to the public's understanding of the visual arts. Modernism and all its spin offs were a massive success, but at what price? Along the way sacrifices were made in the pursuit of

self-discovery. Today, figurative images and narratives have crept back in as movements such as post-modernism sought to end modernism's influence over the production of visual art. However the strongest outside influence still remains banished: the public and their patronage. Modernism taught us that art could be anything, made by anyone for everyone. To live up to this ideology visual art must disassociate its fear of money from its fear of public patronage. The fear of money stems from the fear of minority rule dictating visual art, not from democratic public patronage. It is time for artists to relinquish absolute creative power and form a mutual relationship with an educated public majority.

The abolition of the old visual art market in 1863, with its minority of public patrons dictating the direction of visual art, created a vacuum. With the artist's distracted by their pursuit of 'art for art's sake' galleries took advantage of this vacuum. As a result of the galleries once again a wealthy minority is influencing the direction of visual art as artists eager for critical success pander to them for endorsement and inadvertently their money. In a democratic culture there is no place for dealers and galleries in the emerging and primary visual art markets. A gallery's business model naturally suits the secondary (resale) visual art market. In the emerging and primary visual art markets public opinion should democratically establish the reputations of artists. In the secondary visual art market the dealers' and galleries' business models would be able to help build on these established reputations, allowing the very best artists and artworks to achieve critical acclaim, if the artists so wish. There is one exception. If an artist cares more for fame and money, than for their artistic integrity, then a gallery might be the only way they can cultivate a reputation in the primary visual art market!

Relationalism's battle with the influence of hype

Hype is how galleries maintain their control over the flow of money in the art market and is a massive threat to democratic visual art. Hype is generated by galleries through publicity in the press, endorsements from experts, celebrity associations, and tales of financial returns; with the intention of distorting a viewer's perception of an artwork's value. When a viewer is influenced by hype they have relinquished their decision making ability to the power behind the hype, they are no longer buying the art for their own personal reasons but for some other person's reasons.

Exit Through the Gift Shop is an Oscar nominated film by the street artist Banksy and was released in March 2010. Whether you believe the plot of the movie to be true is unimportant. What is important is that the film reveals the 2008 Los Angeles exhibition *Life is Beautiful* by the artist Mr. Brainwash (MBW) to be an excellent example of the effects that hype and publicity can have on the public's perception of an artwork's value. Prior to *Life is Beautiful* MBW had never exhibited; apparently he hadn't even created an artwork until six months before the show. All of the art in the show appropriated ideas and images from other artists, soup cans, urinals, celebrity portraits, all openly showing their sources of inspiration, using the already entertaining to entertain us. No secret was made of the important role MBW's studio assistants played in the creation of the artworks. In MBW's finished artworks the production techniques are simple and the result not much different from what you find in an art school. There is nothing wrong in any of this, it has been going on since the beginning of art, but how does the content justify the prices? Through hype! Hype: tapping into the current popularity of street art. Hype: graffiti on the LA streets before and during the

exhibition helped enforce the trendy street art image. Hype: exploiting people's greed by offering a free one off print to the first 200 viewers. Hype: the artworks were expensive enough to reassure buyers they were buying quality. Hype: Banksy and other leading street artists endorsed the show. Hype: after all this the press couldn't stay away giving the show its final credibility, publicity and hype that it needed to become a huge commercial success selling over (a claimed) \$1,000,000 of MBW's art.

So now that the film has revealed that MBW's artworks are the by-product of a publicity machine, what will happen to the artworks' value?

1. Option one the public feel that they have been party to a hoax, duped by publicity, hype and the influence of endorsements: the prices drop.

Valuing substance over style the public choose to reject the repackaged superficial contemporary pop-culture and the influence of other people's hyped opinions. The public and the art world have learnt a valuable lesson from Banksy's experiment: that the value of art is in its content and the personal relationship it has with the viewer.

2. Option two the public feel that they have been party to a hoax, duped by publicity, hype and the influence of endorsements: the prices rise.

Valuing style over substance the public choose to accept the repackaged superficial contemporary pop-culture and the influence of other people's hyped opinions. The public and the art world have not learnt a valuable lesson: scared to question the authority of the hype they willingly accept the financial pay-off exposing the truly fickle nature of the art world and the public who willingly accept it.

3. There is a third option which is of course that the viewer and art world are so obsessed with celebrity culture and being a part of 'the next big thing' that they are totally blind/oblivious/impervious to the accusations of vacuous hype.

There is no place for hype in relationalism. Relationalism relies on the public to influence the art world through the personal choices they make, removing the necessity for hype. Hopefully *Exit through the Gift Shop* will focus the public to value art on its content not on the hype. If this can be achieved then maybe art will be produced that will help feed the malnourished minds suffering in option one, allow art to escape the influence of the money driven cannibals from option two and to educate the celebrity blinded of option three.

Valuing Relational Art

Without the control of the galleries' money and hype, but with the influence of the public, how will we judge the value of relational art? Three factors will play an important role in ascertaining the valuing of an artwork: artistic, monetary and social. Considered individually or together they offer the most "democratic method" for judging a visual artwork's value.

Artistic Value

The artistic value of an artwork is made up of three parts: Firstly ideas and theories (the subject), secondly objects from life around us (empirical reality), and finally the creative process (the medium and how it has been crafted). Please see figure 1, "The Balance of Artistic Value"

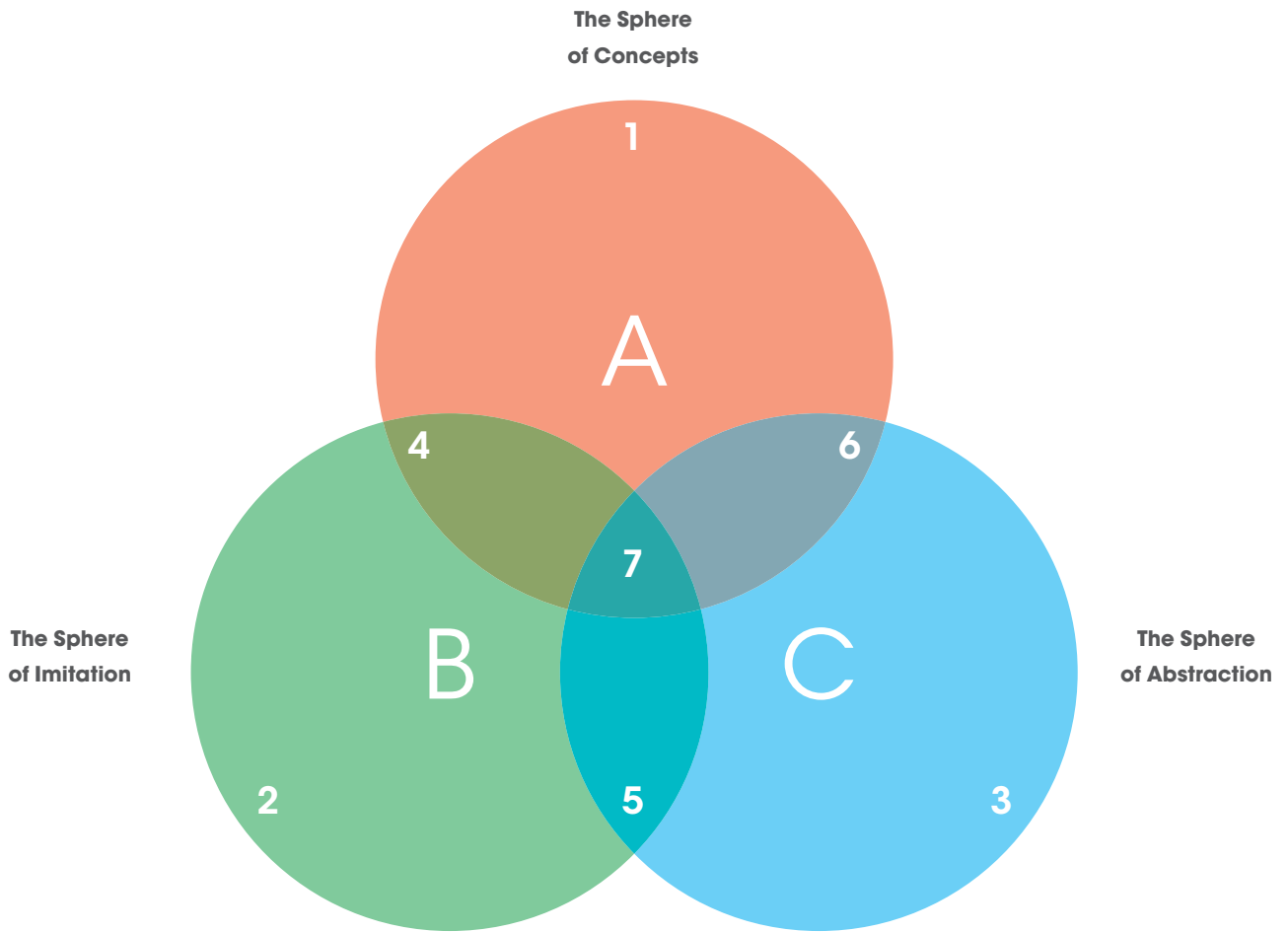
A – The Sphere of Concepts. This is the land of the idea, an area that is dominated by meaning, theory and subject matter in visual art.

B – The Sphere of Imitation. Art in this sphere is concerned with objects, but more specifically the copying, recording and reproduction of existing objects from the life and world around us, an empirical reality.

C – The Sphere of Abstraction. In this sphere things are made, the physical creative process takes shape, leading in its most extreme case to total wild emotional and unconscious expression through a physical medium.

The Balance of Artistic Value

FIGURE.1



- A – The Sphere of Concepts
- B – The Sphere of Imitation
- C – The Sphere of Abstraction
- 1 – Situational Interventions
- 2 – The accidental photograph
- 3 – A child’s first artwork
- 4 – Ready-mades
- 5 – Hyper-realist painting
- 6 – Formalism
- 7 – An equally balanced artwork

1 – Situational Interventions are the most extreme point of the conceptual world, a point where no object or creative process is required in an artwork. The American artist Michael Asher pioneered the term in the 1970's to describe what others were calling Institutional Critiques.

2 – The Accidental Photograph. This is the most extreme point in the sphere of reproduction and copying. The accidental photograph represents an image that will be a perfect likeness/record of an object but with as little thought or creative input as possible.

3 – A Child's first artwork is possibly the best example of pure creativity without any provable thought process, or ability to record an existing object's appearance; it is often categorised as 'Outsider Art'.

4 – Ready-mades are objects that have a great deal of theoretical arguments behind them, for example Duchamp's urinal freeing us from taste and dictators of taste by enlightening us to the fact that anything can be art. As the actual object from life is being used it is obviously the perfect record of that object's appearance but as a result it therefore possesses no physical creative process from the artist.

5 – Hyper-realist painting. The image is the perfect record of an object because the creative process so painstakingly paints every last little detail. The purest hyper-realist paintings ignore meaning, concentrating solely on the creative process and the accuracy of the imitation.

6 – Formalism. The art critic Greenberg stated that art and in particular painting should do what it does best and not worry about other art forms. He stated that all copying and reproducing of existing objects should be banished from painting as images often told a story and that story telling was a discipline of literature. He concluded that painting should do what it does best, flat two-dimensional formless pattern i.e. abstraction. Artists following Greenberg's beliefs had a lot

of theory behind their art and a lot of creative processes were involved too, but obviously no imitated or reproduced objects.

7 – An equally balanced artwork? This diagram suggests there might be such a thing as an equally balanced artwork. Artworks located elsewhere within the diagram are unequally balanced favouring one sphere over another. Artwork located at point seven will have an equal influence of all three spheres.

Life is full of patterns and cycles; the same is true of the visual art world. During the renaissance and even earlier in Ancient Greece visual art was obsessed with the perfection of imitation. Before the invention of photography this required a lot of creative process and so this type of visual art is located somewhere near point five on the diagram. At the turn of the nineteenth century modernism started to grow as painting reacted to the encroachment of photography into its discipline, culminating at point six in Greenberg's artists of the 1950's. In turn artists disenchanted with modernism started to explore conceptual art and shifted visual arts focus to point four. Contemporary Art is still heavily influenced by conceptualism and most of today's 'critically engaging' art continues to be located near point four. With the intervention of the public sphere perhaps the creative process will start to have an influence again. Maybe artists will inadvertently start to explore what art would be like at point seven. Will they have any common attributes? How will they look? What will their messages be? Will they receive critical acclaim? Will they be more popular with the public? Will it bring more beauty into art? Is there utopian art?

Monetary Value

The pricing of art has always been an area of great controversy. For those within the visual arts it is considered vulgar and superfluous to the production of quality in visual art, often leading

to artists creating works that cannot be sold. For the consumer it is contentious because they do not see a regulated formula or pattern in the valuing of visual art. With other commodities the number of people wanting that commodity determines its market value: supply and demand. Supply and demand is manipulated in the visual art market by galleries and dealers who regulate visual art's value. An artwork's value is based upon an artist's reputation, which has nothing to do with inherent value of the object that is being traded. Reputations are manufactured by the visual art world that have nothing to do with demand. This is known as 'Subscription' and is the process by which visual art is currently filtered and legitimised within the visual art world. Currently the value of an artist's work increases in direct proportion to the subscription it attracts and sustains. Artists who aspire to move through the subscription system rely on dealers to manage their career path, in order to maximise the degree of subscription that they can achieve and sustain. For example sales to public collections or significant private collectors can signify important subscription where as some sales to unknown buyers can have a detrimental effect or no effect at all. Rarity is also vital to an artist's work achieving high levels of subscription and consequent value. Managing the subscription process therefore necessitates the galleries to restrict the amount of work for sale, and the number of people who are able to possess work by the artist. Artists that feel galleries pervert the price of art and damage its integrity should sell privately through democratic art communities such as VAT. VAT offers an excellent example of how a visual artwork's monetary value should be ascertained. VAT is not involved in the sale of artworks and therefore does not add any sales commissions on top of the artist's asking prices; VAT merely introduces the relevant parties and is totally impartial. Artists have full control over their sales and are able to price their own

artworks. They can value the art themselves based on what it cost to make, how much they need to live and most importantly of all at a price that will sell. All artworks on VAT are grouped according to the primary defining feature of the visual arts: how they look (please read Chapter 4: *VAT's Style Categories*). This is to aid searching for visual art and to help in the valuation of visual art. The truest method for valuing a commodity is to place it with other similar products on an open market. Placing similar artworks together allows them to be compared equally and a value judgment made. How individuals value an artwork is personal but the clearer and more concisely an artist can transform their idea into a visible artwork the better it will be at communicating with the viewer. From this real reputations are made. The name "VAT" and the obvious financial connotations are quite appropriate for a democratic art community. VAT and its name challenges artists to face up to their commercial responsibilities. If they wish to make a living from being an artist then they have to accept that their artworks are commodities and will be subjected to the same commercial rules as other tradable objects. To reject this for "artistic" reasons damages the integrity of art in the eyes of the public because it is disdainful of other commodities and shows a very pretentious, supercilious and conceited view of art.

Social value

One hundred years after the Enlightenment of Western Europe began in the eighteenth century visual art became fully self aware through the exploration of its own meaning: known as Modernism. The conclusion visual art reached during Modernism's self-exploration was that taste is personal, and therefore anything could be visual art as personal tastes are infinitely different. To understand what visual art is, is to have understood (or to have accepted) the movement of modernism.

The ability of some artists to still gain publicity by exploiting the public's shock and horror that anything can be visual art shows that Modernism is not yet fully integrated into culture. For the educated audiences that do have an understanding of Modernism, the relevance of new artworks that question what is or isn't visual art, diminishes in value as they realise the infinite possibilities of what can still be art. To prevent the continued alienation of the public either through shocking the uneducated or through boring the educated, it is time for visual art to give itself a new direction by readdressing its social function. Visual art needs to change its emphasis from introspection to its antonym extrospection; from pursuing the infinite possibilities of one function (visual art) to pursuing the infinite possibilities of infinite functions (society); it needs to look outside the visual art world to what is happening around it. Artists can use the VAT community website's statistical feedback on popular artwork searches to gauge the cultural mood of the public and create art, including conceptual art, which reflects it. It is time for art to fulfil its duty to others; it is time for art to serve society again by clearly telling the social messages of today. As a result of this functional shift the social value of introspective art will no longer be its influence over the price of art, but its role in art education, a role that the masters of modernism from the 19th and 20th centuries continue to successfully fulfil. However there is potentially still a role for new introspective art within education. For members of the public that struggle to understand modernism, new introspective visual artworks can help put modernism into a contemporary context that could be more easily related to. In art schools new introspective visual art will remain an important part of a students practical course work.

The speaker at the 2010 Royal Academy Annual Dinner was Stephen Fry (actor, writer, journalist, comedian, television presenter and film director!).

Each year the speech is designed to be an annual comment on the state of british culture. This year Fry concentrated on the embarrassment of the viewer when confronted by visual art. "The more important art is, the more embarrassed we are in confronting it," he goes on: "Most of us when we stand in an art gallery are embarrassed because we don't know how to respond...how do you confront art honestly in such a way that you genuinely respond to it? It maybe an artist's work that you have never heard of that makes you go 'WOW! I love this' and then you may think 'am I supposed to love this?'" He concluded his speech with "To confront art all we need is to forget ourselves and our embarrassment and find a way to engage face to face. It is the adventure of a lifetime." VAT believes the public's fear of embarrassment can be removed if they accept that anything has the right to be judged from the view of art. This represents the removal of prejudices, and accepts that everyone is equally entitled to their own tastes. In effect there is no right or wrong just whether or not others share your taste or not. If viewers are aware that anything can be art then the importance of questioning, "what is art?" diminishes because the answer is already "anything". The question relational art needs to answer is "who likes my work and why?" A criticism of Britain has been that it was late to the contemporary art game. This is highlighted by the Tate's incomplete collection of Modern art when compared to France's or America's. During his speech Fry joked that "embarrassment is the national emotion of Britain." VAT hopes Britain can conquer its embarrassment becoming the nation that leads the way in art, opening a new cultural trail of enlightenment and understanding for others to follow. Creating an exciting and vibrant art world where visual art is collected for the enjoyment personal expression and consumption, rather than for the boring reasons of investment and preservation that currently prevail.

So how do we value relational art?

In reality galleries should just be another method for selling visual art; rubber-stamping and endorsements should be left to the museums, impartial critics and the passage of time. Without the hype and money of galleries to carry the sale artists must rely on their art to develop their careers. Collectors in turn should trust their own instincts. With more artworks being grouped according to type, making judgments of value has become easier as varying levels of quality become more apparent. The artwork of a VAT artist really does speak for itself and deserves all the praise it receives. The reasons the public will attribute value to an artwork will naturally vary with personal tastes.

Conclusion

Modernism's and post-modernism's questioning of art has come full circle and reached its natural conclusion. Artists that are unwilling to accept this and continue to over analyse the meaning of visual art should heed the words of one of their own, perhaps their greatest supporter, Clement Greenberg: "In the past such a state of affairs has usually resolved itself into a motionless Alexandrianism, an academicism in which the really important issues are left untouched because they involve controversy, and in which creative activity dwindles to virtuosity in the small details of form, all larger questions being decided by the precedent of the old masters. The same themes are mechanically varied in a hundred different works, and yet nothing new is produce."¹⁶ It is not the first time the decline in creativity has coincided with the end of a movement. "Rococo represented the degradation of the baroque school's classical and Christian values into a heavenly zone of soft porn, shorn of danger conflict or moral purpose... another came at the end of the 19th century, when romanticism and neoclassicism degenerated into academicism and salon art. And in the

16th century, the Italian Renaissance ended in the indulgences of mannerism."¹⁷ The school of modernism is over, its lesson learnt. It is time to put into practice our acquired knowledge. It is time for art to take a new-enlightened direction based on democracy, inclusion, understanding and tolerance: Relationalism.

Relationalism is not a traditional art movement it does not have a particular visual style or restrictions on content. It is about making people aware of their responsibilities as patrons and their ensuing relationship with art. The public has a huge responsibility for what artists produce. Artists can only continue to produce work if the public is willing to buy it. Relationalism wants the public and the artists to embrace this influence. Consequently Relationalism strengthens the public's relationship with art. It requires the public to trust their own judgments, to say what art they like and not be ashamed or embarrassed about it. A person's taste in art says a lot about them as an individual, and they should be able to express this. In a world where anything can be art and anyone can be an artist, relationalism wants artists to acknowledge that the public has the right to their opinion and to art that they like. To explore what people want is to explore society and the human condition; it will develop new exciting artistic challenges that will hopefully come to reflect as well as influence current cultural tastes. If this cultural shift in the perception of art were to happen then finally art would have given up the burden of modernism and be looking outside of its own boundaries to see what it could do for the world around it. If relationalism can succeed then an era of democratic culture in visual art would have been born.

4. VAT's style categories

Re-prioritising the 'visual' in art

"Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak. But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but word can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled."

John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 1972

Definition of the Visual Arts

To categorise something you must define what it does. For the four arts of literature, music, performing art and visual art this is the creation of a man made product. The manmade product will change in each art form according to three variables: The Subject, The Object and The Style.

Subjects portrayed by the visual arts share the same categories as the other arts of literature, music and performing, for example surrealism, conceptualism, humour, irony, materialism, realism and romanticism to name but a few. The subject will control which objects appear in an artwork and they will be chosen for their ability to communicate a message, meaning or tell a story, in other words portray the subject. At present subject matter does not have its own category within VAT; it will share its category with different types of objects under the broader heading of Content.

The object, like the subject, may be common to all the arts, but unlike the subject, the object does not share all the same categories within the arts. The object in literature is the written word: calligraphy. In music the object is the sound. Performing arts' object is the human body. The object in visual art can be anything that is visible, both natural and man-made. At present objects do not have their own category within VAT; it will share its category with different types of subjects under the broader heading of Content.

Style is present in all art forms. Prose and poetry are different forms of style in literature. Music's style is very similar to literature; it too uses both prose and poetry. In the performing arts, styles range from dance in ballet to acting in the theatre. Style in the visual arts refers to the manner in which an object is portrayed. For example when two separate artworks portray the same object, the object never looks the same (unless it is a reproduction or forgery). This difference is caused by artist's individual perception of how objects should look. This difference is Visual Style.

The four visual art styles

There is currently no formal way to categorise the many different individual visual styles in the visual arts. At present all styles are categorised according to the name they were given at their conception. For example the art movements Impressionism and Cubism are both considered individual visual styles. This can be a very confusing method, as it requires a specialist knowledge and understanding of all the different art movements within the history of visual art. To simplify things VAT has created four style categories based on how they look.

Representational Art

In this category the intention of the artist and the focus of the artwork are on imitating objects accurately. The artist does not use the materials to add any expressive or visually stylistic qualities to alter the object's form. An example of an artwork that belongs to this category would be the Renaissance artist Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* (1503/06).

Semi-representational Art

In this category the intention of the artist and the focus of the artwork are no longer solely on imitating objects accurately but also to add expressive and visually stylistic qualities. Through the use of materials the objects portrayed in the artwork are still clearly recognisable, but their forms will differ in appearance from the objects' in reality. An example of an artwork that belongs to this category would be the Impressionist Claude Monet's *Poppies* (c1873).

Semi-Abstract Art

In this category the intention of the artist and the focus of the artwork are no longer on the imitation of objects but on the distortion of the objects' forms and the creation of new

forms. Forms are observed and then converted into patterns which are read by the spectator primarily as independent relationships, however visual references remain that give clues to the original source. An example of an artwork that belongs to this category would be the Cubist Pablo Picasso's Portrait of Kahnweiler (1910).

Abstract Art

In this category the artwork will no longer imitates objects, instead it has become an object in its own right. Any object that the artwork may have been based on is no longer discernable. The intention of the artist is to create new unique forms. An example of an artwork that belongs to this category would be Lovers (1984-9) by the abstract artist Howard Hodgkin.

Distinguishing the borders between the visual art styles

The creation of four visual style categories, in which to place the whole of art history, is problematic. The lines dividing the four visual styles are not narrow or clear. The edges of the lines blur between styles. Like all borders, they are disputable. Most of the disputes artists will have with the borders will be based on intention. Intention can not be allowed to influence categories. The art is to be judged on how it looks not on how the artists intended it to look. The division between the categories needs to remain equal and constant.

Representational art and Semi-representational art

The visual differences between Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa and Claude Monet's Poppies do not seem obvious when viewed from a distance, however close to they become apparent. Where as close to the Mona Lisa still resembles the forms it imitates, in Poppies it appears that 'short cuts' have been taken in its creation. For example the lady's face is little more than a brown 'impression'

of a face. For an artwork to be considered representational it has to stand up to close scrutiny in every sense. If it looks like it imitates the object accurately, then it is representational. Minor blemishes can be forgiven, as perfection is a hard skill to achieve, however repetitive blemishes may lead the artwork to become semi-representational. This goes for well meaning artists who believe their artworks are representational because that was their intention. The artist's intention is not important, only what the end result looks like.

Semi-representational art and Semi-abstract art

This border is probably the least clear and yet possibly the most important. It is unclear because artists have to decide when the image in their artwork is influenced more by the form of the object they are imitating or more by abstraction. Artworks in semi-representational category are primarily influenced by imitation, the copying of the forms of an existing object. Semi-abstract artworks are primarily concerned with the creation of new and unique forms with only the smallest evidence of influence from existing objects and shapes. This is important because it marks the beginning of the boundary between imitation and creation.

Semi-abstract art and Abstract art

The final border is blurred by the individual viewer's ability to recognise and decipher forms. To belong to the abstract category an artwork must be a new creation, totally unique. It cannot contain any visibly discernable reference to another existing object. Any sign of imitation and it has to be categorised outside the abstract category.

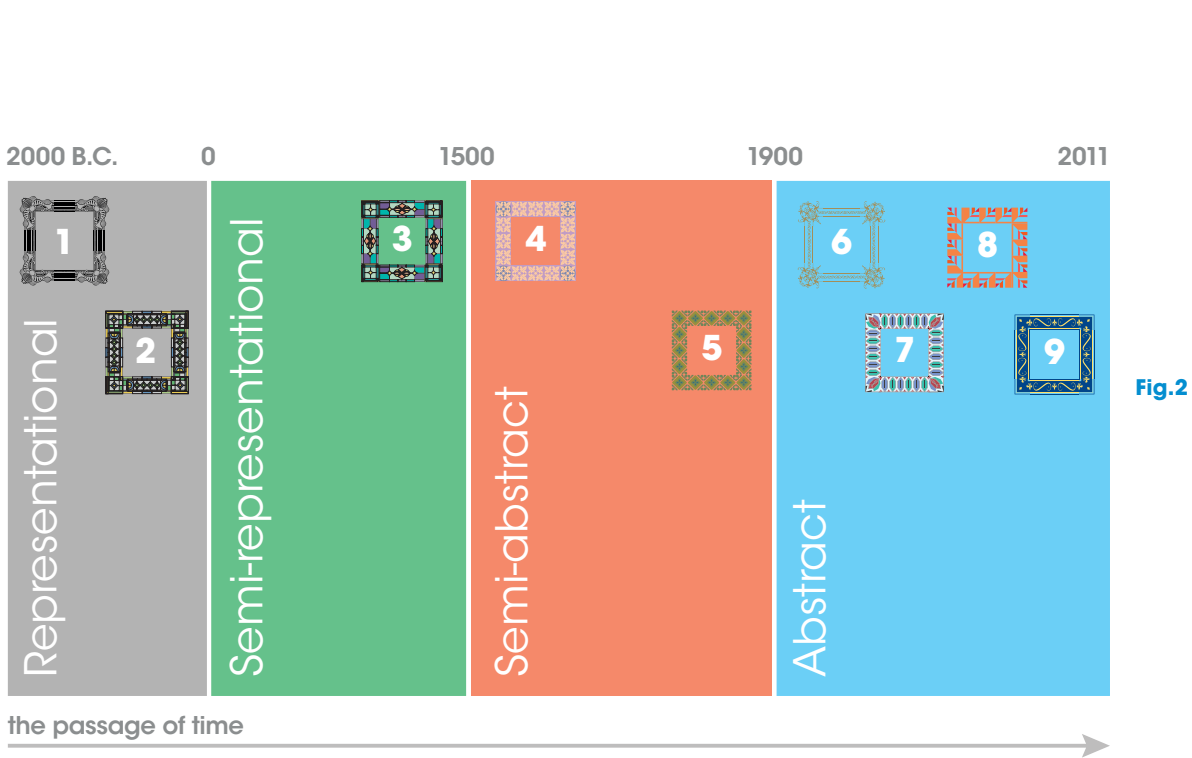


Fig.2

- 1 – Start of known art history
- 2 – Egyptian wall art, c. 2000 BC
- 3 – Mona Lisa (1503/06)
- 4 – Poppies (1873)
- 5 – Portrait of Kahnweiler (1910)
- 6 – L.S.Lowry, c.1930's
- 7 – Number 1A (1948)
- 8 – Hyper-realism, c.1980's
- 9 – Present day

The effect the four visual art styles have on categorising art according to history

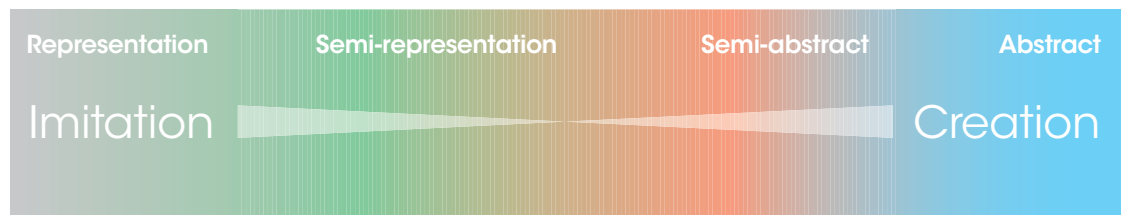
Art History has always structured itself according to a linear time line along which art 'develops' as new art movements come and go (figure.2).

1-9 represents very basically where the artworks appear chronologically in art history. No matter how you rearrange the four coloured bars that represent the four style categories, it is impossible to get the artworks into the correct categories with out breaking the art history timeline. Categorising art according to visual style means that the art history time line does not work.

Creating new models to define visual art style

If we ignore the chronological order of art styles and create a new style model by grouping them according to their new categories, we see there is a linear line, a Style Path (figure 3) as the four categories share the gradual deconstruction of

Fig.3



an object's form or the gradual recreation of an object's form (depending which direction you move along the style path).

However grouping style according to these new categories it becomes clear that some artworks can cross over the boarder between abstract and representational. The visual style model is not linear, but cyclical (figure 4).

A cyclical model creates a new border between the two categories of representational art and abstract art. Like the other three borders there are some artworks that challenge the border between these style categories: Combines, Junk Art, Assemblages and the collages of Dada. For example *Royal Tide IV* (1959-60) by Louise Nevelson is a classic example of Assemblage

Art. The artwork is made up of many found objects: Banisters, door handles, table legs, babies rattles etc. As individual parts they are recognisable individual objects that should be classified in representational art, but once she has placed them together and painted them uniformly in gold, the sum of the parts no longer resembles any thing recognisable, it could now belong in the abstract art category. Working in two dimensions the collages by the Dada artist Hannah Hoch pose the same problem. For example her artwork *Cut with the Cake Knife* (c.1919) uses photos from newspapers and magazines that on their own would be considered representational, but when combined in a collage as a whole, they represent nothing. They could also be called abstract art. The failure of the Visual Style Cycle to categorise these artworks not only reinforces the concept that the style categories of representation and abstract are joined, but also that the boundaries between all style categories are blurred. There is no precise line or border; the cycle is one continuous fluid group of visual styles leading from one to the next. The natural evolution of the visual style cycle leads to a more comprehensive model: VAT's Visual Art Style Wheel (figure.5).

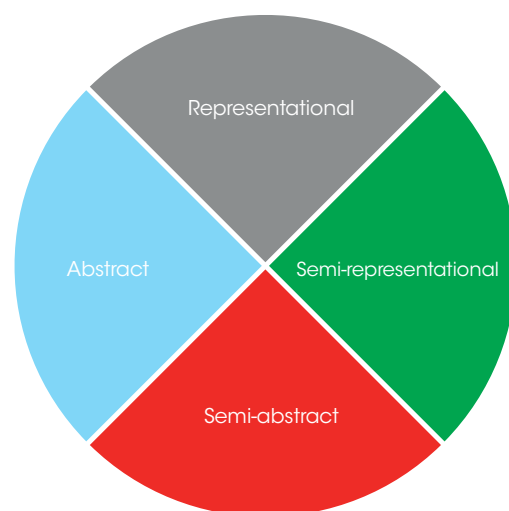


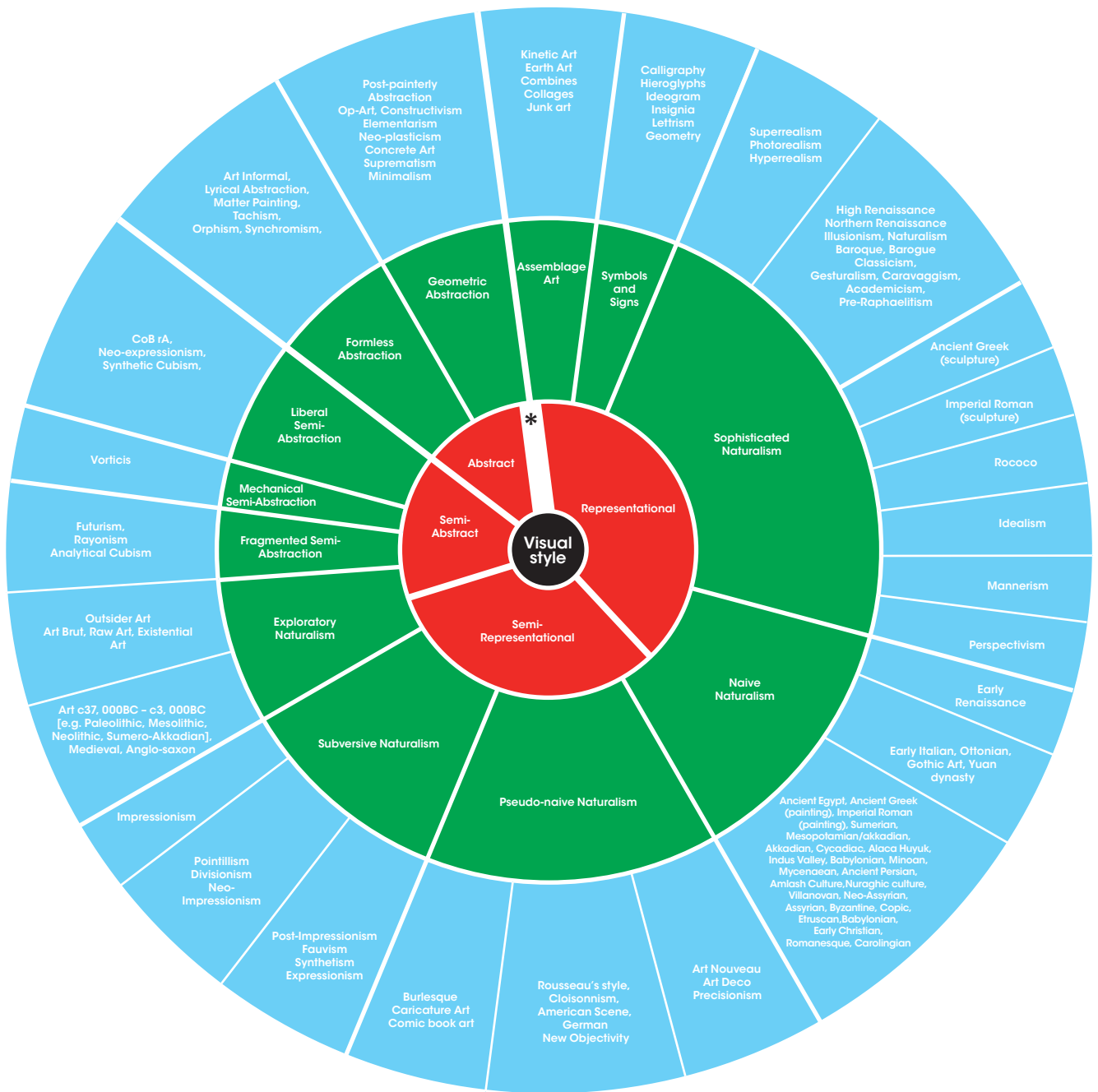
Fig.4

The wheel is based on the principles of the four visual style categories, but they are now no longer clearly divided. New sub categories have been developed, which in turn are further divided up by traditional movements and styles from the History of Art. The borders have been

VAT's Visual Art Style Wheel

Fig. 5 - The VAT Style Wheel (Not to scale)

*The border between Abstract Art and Representational Art has had to be represented by a thicker border in order to highlight that Geometric Abstraction and Assemblage Art can be in both categories.



replaced by a graduation of styles. The wheel enables the traditional movement categories such as Impressionism and Cubism to be included. The Visual Style Wheel will hopefully offer, and eventually come to represent, a new simpler understanding of how the visual arts work.

Assemblage Art

Assemblage Art can belong in either Abstract or Representational Art. What differentiates which category an assemblage piece belongs in, is down to the balance between the look of the individual parts and the look of the resulting sum of these parts. In other words if the artwork as a whole appears abstract in spite of the fact that it is made up of many representational parts (e.g. combines and collages) then it should be abstract.

Symbols and Signs

This category is concerned with the individual letter, ideogram, hieroglyph or insignia, not words and sentences as they belong in literature. Like Assemblage art this category has the ability to be confused between Abstract Art and Representational Art. Until a letter, ideogram, hieroglyph or insignia is given a culturally established and accepted meaning it is just an abstract mark.

Sophisticated Naturalism

From Super-realism to Perspectivism all the art styles referred to as Sophisticated Naturalism represent the pinnacle of man and machine's efforts to represent and imitate reality as accurately and naturally as possible.

Naïve Naturalism

The art styles in Naïve Naturalism all tried to imitate reality accurately. However due to technical inability or poor tools and materials the artist was unable to obtain this level of perfection.

Pseudo-Naïve Naturalism

In Pseudo-Naïve Naturalism the artist's intention is for the artwork to appear naïve, simplified, 'childlike' in its creation and yet still imitate reality accurately. As the style categories can not take into consideration an artist's intention, technically this category should be combined with Naïve Naturalism. However the difference behind the motivation of each artwork does seem to create a different form of naivety in style.

Subversive Naturalism

In addition to a pseudo-naïve naturalist style being applied to the artworks, the artists have started to also shift their emphasis from how accurately the objects are portrayed to the materials being used.

Exploratory Naturalism

Art in this section easily crosses the boundary between Semi-abstract and Semi-representational. It is difficult to decipher whether differing art styles in Exploratory Naturalism are either because the artist tried to imitate reality accurately but due to very poor technical inability or very poor tools and materials they were unable to, or because the artist is deliberately exploring the differences between an artist's intention to represent reality and to distort it.

Fragmented Semi-Abstraction

The artwork depicts a reality as if seen through a pane of shattered glass. The objects in the artwork have gone through a simple singular abstraction process and now appear as if they can be seen from many viewpoints at the same time. It is still important for the object to be partially recognisable for this fragmented effect to work, however the objects are significantly distorted enough to appear in the Semi-abstract category.

Mechanical Semi-Abstraction

In addition to fragmented semi-abstractation another level of abstraction has been applied to the image. The objects depicted are reduced to basic geometric forms, which give the objects the illusion of being mechanical or manufactured by machine.

Liberal Semi-Abstraction

With Liberal semi-abstractation many levels of abstraction would have been applied to an object at once. As a result this form of abstraction is often the most distorted and free from constraints.

Formless Abstraction

This category is a natural progression from Liberal Semi-abstractation. It is free and unbound. The single and most obvious difference now is that there are no traces of influence from existing objects it is totally abstract.

Geometric Abstraction

As the name suggests Geometric Abstraction is much more controlled than formless abstraction. The artworks become regulated by geometric rules, resulting in very crisp and clear edges. Single geometric forms belong in representational art; however when many parts are combined the overall pattern created is abstract in design.

Missing movements and schools from the Style Wheel

The following are either Art Movements from a particular historical period and represent a broad range of styles and subject matter, or they are Schools of thought, practicing in particular styles or movements. Neither are individual styles.

- Movements: Renaissance, Symbolism, Modernism, Decadent Movement, Surrealism, Dada, Abstract-expressionism, Post-modernism, Pop Art, Conceptual art, Neo-Dada, Neo-pop, Internet Art, Relationalism.

- Schools: Arts and Crafts, Nabis, Salon de la Rose+Croix, Vienna Secession, Mir Iskusstva (World of art), Die Brucke, Ashcan School, Bubnovyi Valet (Jack of Diamonds), Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider), Pittura Metafisica (Metaphysical Painting), Hungarian Activism, De Stijl, Abeitsrat fur Kunst (Workers' Council for Art), Novembergruppe (November Group), Bauhaus, Ecole de Paris (School of Paris), Novecento Italiano, Neo-Romanticism, Outsider Art, Beat Art, Kitchen Sink School, Funk Art, Situationalist International, GRAV (Group for Research in Visual Art), Fluxus, Installation, Supports-Surfaces, Earth Art, Site Works, Arte Povera, Sensationalism, Art Brut (Raw Art), Social Realism.

- The following are schools of thought that were developed as part of Sophisticated Naturalism but can in fact be adapted to any imitative style category:

Classicism, Secularism, Monumentalism, Humanism, Allegoricism, Pietism, Sectarianism, Emotionalism, Absolutism, Neo-classicism, Romanticism, Orientalism, (Neo) Medievalism, Realism, Materialism, Social Realism, Socialist Realism.

- Sound Art, Performance Art, Video Art and Body Art are often assumed to be part of the visual arts, which they are not. Sound Art is part of Music. Performance Art, Video Art, Body Art are all types of Performing Arts. Relational Art differs from performance art because it requires artistic props for the viewers to interactive with, which remain as relics for others to see after the initial viewer's participation.

Clarifying the difference between Abstract Art and Representational Art

The artworks and their categories have all been linked by one variable: how artworks imitate objects. Abstraction's relationship to this variable

differs. Where as the other three categories are all related by how they imitate, abstraction is related by how it does not imitate. If we look at what abstraction does do, rather than what abstraction does not do, we see that abstraction's primary function is creation rather than imitation. The visual arts can be split into two groups: Creative Visual Arts and Imitative Visual Arts.

The function of Imitative Visual Arts as we have seen in the three style categories of representation, semi-representation and semi abstract is the imitation of existing objects according to varying levels of accuracy. Creative visual art is entirely different. Its function is to bring about the existence of an object, to create a totally new idea/concept/invention for a form without meaning except to exist as a work of creative visual art. It is the physical representation of a theoretical image never seen before. Objects that serve other functions may have artistic qualities, such as design, but their existence is no longer to be purely creative visual art and as such belong outside the abstract category.

According to semiotics (the study of signs and symbols) artworks are made up of two parts: the signifiers and the signified. Signifiers are the objects that are depicted in an artwork and the signified is the subject/meaning/function/purpose behind the image. If nothing is signified in an artwork then it is a work of creative visual art and belongs in the abstract art category. As soon as any thing is signified in an artwork then it is a work of Imitative visual arts and belongs in either the representational, semi-representational or semi-abstract categories. There are three recognised types of signifiers that help to clarify when an artwork is imitative visual art or creative visual art.

Icons

These are artworks whose forms have the actual characteristics of their meanings, in other

words they tend to represent what it is they are describing and as such are categorised within the imitative visual arts. For example Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* (1888) is a still life oil painting of a bunch of sunflowers in a yellow vase. The signifier is the painting of the sunflowers and the signified, the meaning, is the bunch of sunflowers. The signifier and the signified are a direct match.

Index

An artwork whose form has characteristics which are only associated with its meaning, in other words it borrows an existing image to represent its meaning. For example the Jolly Roger is a black flag with a white skull and two white crossed bones below. The signifier is the skull and crossed bones but the signified or meaning of the flag does not match. Over time the Jolly Roger has developed many meanings from different cultures: an electric hazard, a warning of poison, an emblem of piracy, an emblem of the Royal Navy Submarine Service or an indication of death. The style categories are based upon classifying artworks by how the signifier looks, not on the signified. Therefore all index artworks are classified by what they look like, not by their adopted cultural meanings. In the Jolly Rogers' case, because it is a skull and some crossed bones, its content would be classified as Human Anatomy within one of the imitative visual art style categories.

Symbol

This is an artwork whose form is arbitrarily associated with its meaning, in other words they are man made signs which are only considered to represent their meaning because of the association we have attached to them (e.g. National flags, alphabets, road signs). Icons and indexes fit easily into the imitative style categories as they include in some way the physical characteristics of an established

existing object. Symbols are completely man made abstract forms that bare no resemblance to their meanings or other objects. If nothing were signified by the symbol then the artwork would be creative visual art and belong in the abstract art category. A man made symbol that signifies something has been granted permission by culture to exist as a part of nature because it has an established permanent physical form representing its meaning. Therefore any reproductions of these types of symbols are works of imitative visual art. For example the Stars and Stripes flag is synonymous with the United States of America. There is hardly a culture on earth that upon seeing it wouldn't think of the USA. *Three Flags* (1958) by Jasper Johns is a reproduction of the established natural physical symbol of the United States of America, the stars and stripes, and therefore is imitative visual art.

At some point a symbol can become the established permanent and standard natural physical representation of an idea. Why and when this should be, isn't decided by an individual but by culture. People are never going to know all the forms signifiers take in our world and whether or not something is being signified. Hopefully the visual style categories and the models can help teach people a better understanding and knowledge of their own art heritage and of other art forms from around our world.

Examples of the visual style categorisation system at work

Established Symbols

Black Square (c.1915) by the Russian Suprematist Kasimir Malevich is considered by many to be one of the purest examples of abstraction and therefore a new creation. It is by contrast one of the purest examples of representational art. The equilateral square is a man made mathematical construct consisting of four equal length sides

and four equal angled corners. The signifier, Malevich's Black Square, is the perfect example of what a black square looks like, the signified. It is the representation of the accepted conceived image of an equilateral square. Therefore it belongs in the representational art category. Had he drawn it free hand without a ruler or protractor and the lines and angles were inaccurate then it might have been considered semi-representational, or even semi-abstract.

Non-Established Symbols and Indexes

Despite a square being a man made mathematical concept and not actually having a natural physical form, its conceptual form has been permanently agreed upon. Love and hate are emotions, they are not objects, and they do not have a physical presence. An artist, who creates a symbol to represent either love or hate, cannot classify it as representational, because no culture has a fixed or singularly recognisable form to represent either love or hate. The artwork will always be abstract. For example the use of a heart on valentine cards is often considered to be a symbol of love. It is in reality an index of love and would be categorised as a semi representational image of a heart, not love. Alternatively trying to represent love, as an allegory will result in the finished artwork being categorised according to the icon or index signifier the artist borrowed to represent love. For example renaissance artists often used cupid to symbolise someone falling in love. Cupid is in fact a boy with wings; it is by these attributes that the image would be classified, not by love. In both examples love is the subject of the artwork, not what is actually visible.

Contrived Icons

Artworks that depict fantasy or science fiction themes have a similar problem to love and hate in that there are no singularly recognisable natural forms for aliens, monsters or space crafts,

but unlike love and hate, and like geometry, the contrived icons portrayed exist physically on a theoretical level. Aliens and monsters maybe inventive creations but they are icons with functions, and forms can be created to represent these functions. For example cupid is in some senses a monster. No boy exists in reality that possesses a pair of working wings, but he does exist in fantasy. In fantasy Cupid is a boy who can fly and his image suggests that is what he can do. Signifiers that accurately imply what is being signified are classified within the imitative visual arts.

Artificially Creating Symbols

Barbara Hepworth's sculpture *Hollow Form with White Interior* (1963) is an abstract and unusual form made from guarea wood and partially painted. As a signifier it belongs in the abstract art category because nothing is signified, it is a newly created symbol and does not imitate or appropriate any existing forms. Consider for a minute Hepworth takes a photo of her sculpture and puts it up for sale. It could be argued that the photo is an icon because it is the perfect representation of the symbol *Hollow Form with White Interior* and therefore belongs in the representational art category. The photo may be a perfect two-dimensional copy of the symbol, but there is still nothing signified, the signifier has no recognised meaning. Therefore the artwork will remain in the abstract category.

Artificially Creating Indexes

Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades questioned art's existence and in so doing were the first artworks to challenge the boundary between representational art and abstract art. The most infamous of his ready-mades was *Fountain* (1917). He took an ordinary icon, a urinal, turned it on its back, signs it "R. Mutt 1917" and titled it *Fountain*. It is often assumed that as a fountain it is an abstract form

because it bears no resemblance to any existing fountains and can't perform the functions of a fountain. However for an artwork to be categorised abstract it must take on the qualities of a symbol. Duchamp has merely altered the urinal's signifier from an icon of a urinal, to the index of a fountain. Changing the signified to a fountain will not change the fact that the signifier will always remain a piece of bathroom accessory associated with a gentleman's hygiene. That is it's culturally accepted and established function, it is not established as a fountain. Duchamp's *Fountain* still retains all the characteristics of a urinal and as such must be classified with in representational art as a urinal.

Conclusion

In a world where every manmade object is a work of visual art, and anyone can be an artist, every person should be able to gain access. VAT hopes that its art search system and in particular the four new visual style categories de-mystifies years of art history, to make all visual art accessible to all who want to view it.

5. VAT's services and benefits

"What I hear is valueless; only what I see is living, and when I close my eyes my vision is even more powerful"

On mystery and Creation, Giorgio de Chirico, 1913

A. Artists

Independent Website

Personal URL address, continual upgrades to keep your individual site fresh and modern.

Public Exposure

With your own webpage on VAT, your art will benefit from the community's promotional, advertising and marketing campaigns.

Autonomy

VAT does not charge a commission on artwork sales. Retain full control over your pricing, mailing lists and networking.

Statistical Feedback

From individual page views to artwork search patterns, from user reviews and ratings to popular exhibition venues.

Exhibitions and Events

Excellent opportunities to exhibit with VAT's non-commercial exhibition spaces and participate in studio open days.

Equality and Quality

We welcome all genres, mediums and styles of visual art. The quality and integrity of the VAT artist community is maintained by membership fees and consumer demand.

B. Venues

Stand Out From the Crowd

Display VAT artworks to create atmosphere and character. Hosting regular art exhibitions guarantees venues remain fresh and vibrant.

Diversify

Exhibitions are an integral part of the art scene, subsequently exhibiting venues will attract new customers.

VAT Webpage

List your contact details, information and services on VAT. Benefit from the community's promotional, advertising and marketing campaigns.

Simplicity

Venues are not obliged to handle the sale of artworks, minimalising interference to a venue's daily routines.

Exhibition Pack

Contains everything a venue and artist needs to run an exhibition: wall tags, exhibition poster, exhibition flyer and VAT promotional leaflets.

Value

VAT membership is free for exhibition venues and there are no exhibition charges.

C. Collectors

Unbeatable Prices

VAT does not charge commission on the sale of artworks making us more affordable than galleries and totally impartial.

Artistic Quality and Variety

With an egalitarian selection policy VAT has one of the largest growing online galleries, offering the very best variety and choice of quality artworks for sale.

Simple Searches

Find artworks based on what you see, not on what you know. Search for local artists and local exhibition venues.

Live Email Updates (RSS feeds)

Receive live email updates about saved artwork searches, favourite artists and local exhibitions that you are monitoring.

Viewing Art

Liaise directly with artists to view art or visit one of VAT's diverse and vibrant exhibition spaces.

Advice and Support

The Knowledgebase is a fantastic resource tool for all members offering advice and information from artists, collectors, exhibition venues, critics and VAT.

6. Conclusion

"Art that has to be in a gallery to be art isn't art"

The Stuckist Manifesto, Billy Childish and Charles Thomson, 1999

The emergence of democratic art communities will force the art world to re-examine itself in many areas that it once thought were unimpeachable. For example how do you value an artwork: financially, socially, artistically, or all three? Then what order? The stockist quote above may be indefensible but it does raise some interesting questions. What type of value does an artwork have if it can only be seen in a gallery? How much of any value does it possess? Does gallery dependency make it any more or less valuable?

Along with value, the art world has been challenged by Relationalism, the ideology of expressive life and the gallery's role in the art market. However, all these debates are the result of two innovations, the democratic art community business model and the new visual style categories. Figure 6 is a flow chart showing how we hope these two innovations may come to influence the future of visual art.

If VAT succeeds it will create larger emerging and primary visual art markets offering more opportunities for emerging artists and new collectors to get involved. Our other primary aim is that we achieve a cultural shift in how and why we buy contemporary visual art, from reasons of investment and preservation to the joy of personal expression and consumption. VAT does not expect everyone to believe in our ideas, but we do hope that they will at the very least start a new debate in art and offer a new direction for artists to explore. If you would like to comment on any points within our manifesto please visit our website: www.visualarttrader.co.uk/manifesto

In a world where every manmade object is a work of visual art, and anyone can be an artist, every person should be able to gain access. VAT hopes to make all visual art accessible to all who want to view it.

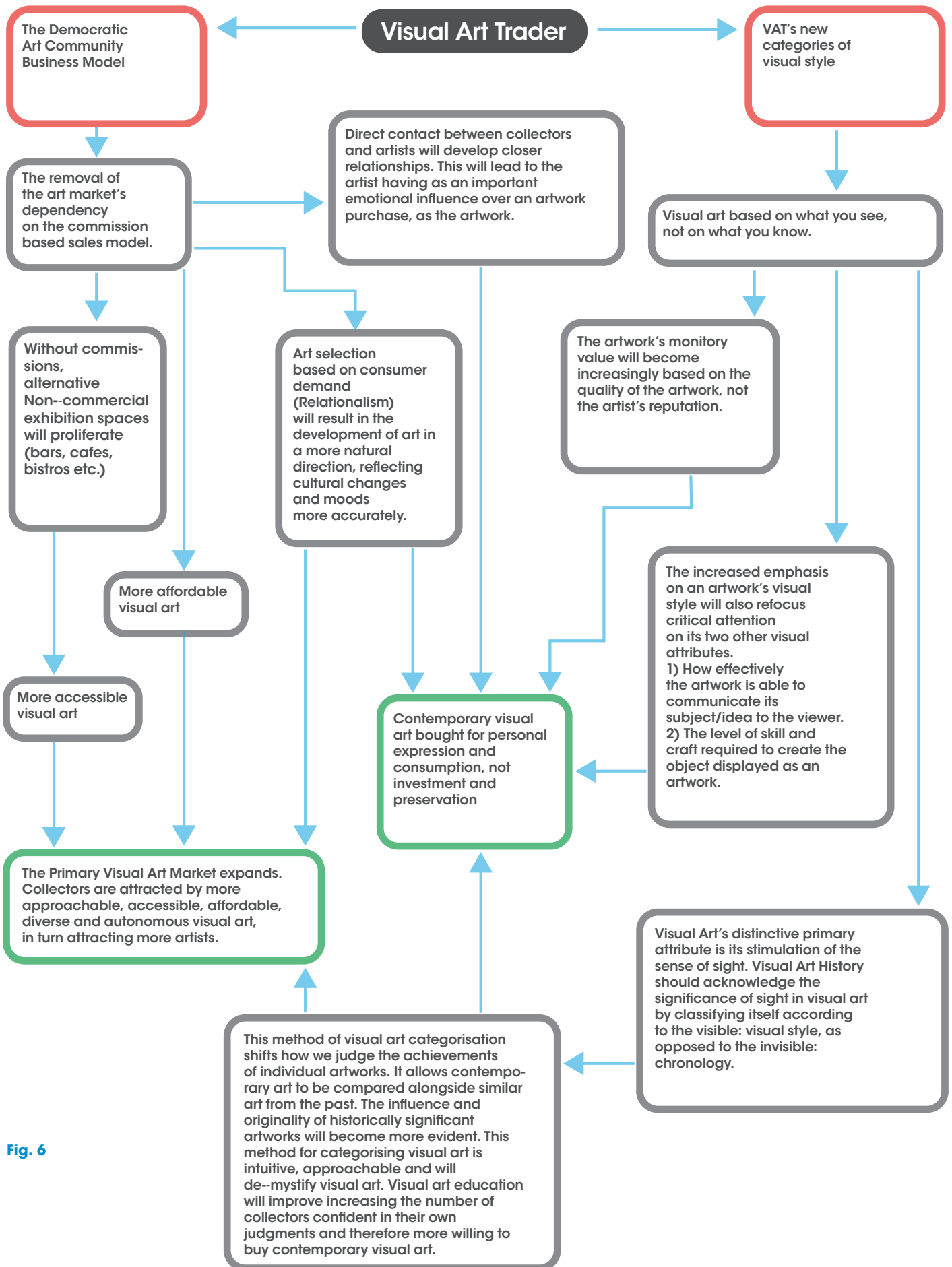


Fig. 6

7. Page of thanks

*"I am dreaming of a time, when time becomes a dream,
and every time I do, I am dreaming of you."*

Cxxxx, Valentine's Day, 2000

VAT would not have been possible with out
the loyal and patient support of my family and
friends and in particular my loving wife Jessica.

8. Footnotes

"Poor is the pupil who does not surpass his master"

Leonardo da Vinci (allegedly)

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