

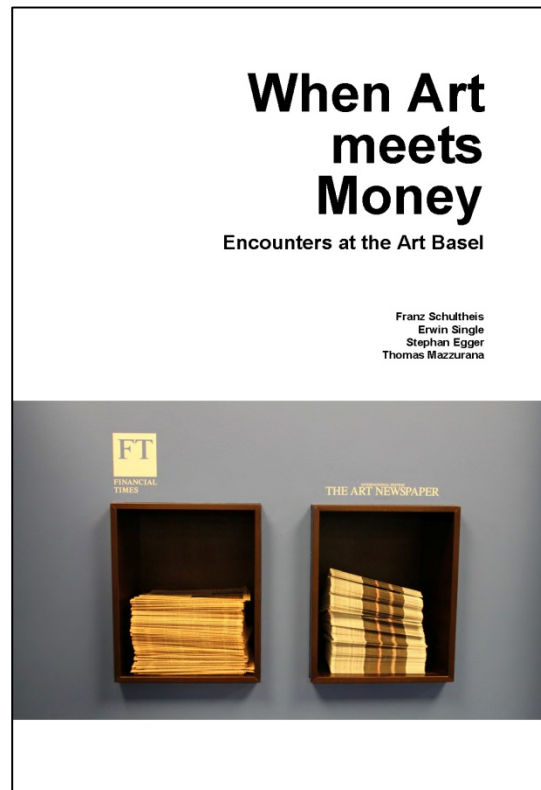
On the Economy of Symbolic Goods

Ethnographical Explorations at the Art Basel

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Ethnographical Explorations at the three Art Basel

Comparative look on intercultural convergences and divergences of „love of art“ and social attitudes and practices of „inhabitants“ of Art World

Art Basel in Basel 2011-2013

Art Basel in Miami Beach 2012-2013

Art Basel in Honkong 2013-2014

Ethnographical Explorations at the Art Basel

Research Methods and Strategies

1. In-depth interviews with 120 selected gallery owners, collectors, curators, art consultants and, last but not least, artists.
2. Visitor and Gallery Survey in Basel, Miami Beach, Hong Kong.
3. Socio-spatial analyses on the internal structure of Art Basel
4. Systematic participant observation of the various facets of this "event"
5. Photographic documentation of the observable social practices complete the research design of this ethnographic field study.
6. All these research methods and strategies were used systematically in our comparative approach of the three Art Basel-Worlds.

Markets of symbolic goods: sociological perspectives

“The art market, which trades in objects which are not tradable, is one of those practices in which the logic of the pre-capitalist economy has survived in a similar fashion to the economy of exchange between generations in a different context. As they function as practical denials it is only possible when carrying them out to do what one does by acting as if one were not doing them.” *Pierre Bourdieu*

A singular market for singular goods

Whereas the typical market is the „most impersonal relationship“ (Max Weber) of practical life into which human beings can enter with one another, in the art market, the standing of the buyer, as well as the standing of the seller, is of the greatest significance and becomes in itself a factor of value-production

Ethnography of Art Basel

At the centre of our qualitative interview with these market actors is the question of how the increasingly critical, or even contradictory, relationship between "art" and "commerce" which has been caused by current changes in the art world (the increasing significance of new and/or the "nouveau riche" buyer groups, the role of the market price amongst the consecration of artists and art works) is being addressed by those affected and which discursive strategies to reduce cognitive and ethical dissonances can be identified.

Double binds and ambivalences

Art Basel seen by gallerists:

- Excellent results and strong sales“, but
- Increasing costs (50.000 or 100.000 US-Dollars) and necessity to bring fresh goods on the market
- New customers to win and new links with collectors, but:
- Business in local gallery often neglected (Art Fair „cannibalizes“ the gallery-sales on the local level
- Art Basel as a „brand“, high recognition for a participant gallery, but: high competition and intransparent selection
 - In short: A necessary evil!!!

Double binds and ambivalences

Art Basel seen by collectors and visitors:

Giving access to Art for a lot of people, but:

High social selectivity of access (3 groups of VIP and intransparent selection)

Giving an overall picture of the market in short time, but without contemplation in „white cube“-atmosphere

Meeting point for collectors and their networking, but:

Liaisons between art and commerce too evident, danger of massification and banalization of art

The new market logic seen by Art Basel visitors

60% agree, that market prizes are becoming more and more the most important indicator of quality of art objects

60% think that the arrival of very wealthy new art buyers determines the explosion of market prizes

Only 8% think that this could be due to higher quality of contemporary art

90% say that prizes of contemporary art are exaggerate