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ART IN THE ARMS OF POWER

It is inconceivable that living "like an artist" would have exerted any appeal to segments of the middle class if significant changes in the social position of art and artists had not taken place since the end of World War II. From a marginal and often elitist aesthetic concern, art moved into a central position in the cultural symbolism of an increasingly materialistic world. Artists enjoyed more visibility in the mass media as well as at prestigious social gatherings, and since the most prominent artists were also selling their work at the highest prices, it is reasonable to suppose that their visibility was connected, in some measure, with their commercial viability. But at the same time, public discussion transformed policy toward the arts into a national priority. Just as artists' prices and their dealers' commissions depended on which country "won" the Venice Biennale, so—in a larger sense—did national prestige. Artists began to be regarded as social assets rather than bohemians, and their work acquired important new patronage. Through state funding, they started to earn a steady living at their work. This more or less brought the idea of the Works Projects Administration (WPA) of the Depression into a liberal society that was based on economic growth at home and political expansion abroad.

There have been two periods in the twentieth century when the relation between art and society was fundamentally altered: the 1930s and the 1960s. Prior to the Great Depression, between 1900 and 1930, artists—or at least the most noteworthy artists in the art capitals of Paris, Berlin, New York, and Moscow—began to make a living from their art work. During the Depression, for the first time, artists were recognized as part of the labor force. In the United States, this recognition entitled them to get jobs with the WPA, jobs which encouraged artists—again, for the first time—to organize themselves in work-related groups. Often these were unions, like the Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors. The friendships that artists formed in those years of working together on large projects rather than alone in their studios outlasted the Depression. Many of the New York artists who met at the WPA—a group of two thousand that included Mark Rothko, Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, Arshile Gorky, and Adolph Gottlieb—continued to meet informally. Several of their social circles eventually developed labels by which they became known to the art public: a group that coalesced around the studio of German painter Hans Hofmann; "the Ten," which included Rothko and Gottlieb; the "Whitney [Museum] Dissenters." In time these groups also became known by a locale—their studios and the bars that they frequented—which emphasized their collective identity. The most prominent of these groups after the War was the Tenth Street School of Abstract Expressionists. Their nearby hangouts were the Subjects of the Artist School, The Club, and the Cedar Tavern (described in the diaries of Anais Nin), and the two critics who hung out with them were Harold Rosenberg and Clement Greenberg. Loosely but definitively associated after World War II, these artists became known as a meta-group—the New York School.1

The moral seriousness and political purpose that made 1930s art, especially Social Realism, so useful to the government during the Depression were transformed by the affluence that followed World War II. The international expansion of a more highly developed American industry, and the greater sophistication of a public that had renewed its contact with European cultural forms, changed artists and the art they produced. The dominant mode of artistic expression, as we have already seen, became abstract, contemplative, rueful. New York supplanted Paris as the capital of the art world. Artists, that is, the more distinguished among them, developed the status of cult figures. If this didn't immediately make them rich, at least it made them famous. The public followed their careers in exhibitions, visiting the Tenth Street artists' co-operatives as often as uptown galleries, and in magazines for both the literati who read Rosenberg's or Greenberg's essays and the merely literate who wanted to know, as Life asked about Jackson Pollock in 1949, "Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?"

By the 1960s the new affluence and sophistication had opened up the art market to a broader group of consumers, who were more middle-class than the patrons who had predominated in art buying up to this time, and a less elitist group of art gallery owners, who frankly pursued new art and new artists and directed them toward a waiting public. In style the art of the 1960s was more ironic that rueful, more reflective than contemplative, more influenced by Pop than by High Culture. The oracular dominance of the New York School ceded to a pluralism in New York art. Younger artists, outpriced by property values in Greenwich Village but also put off by the success of postwar masters, moved away from Tenth Street. Working alone again, in studios all over Lower Manhattan, including the area that eventually became known as SoHo, artists multiplied in
number. They seemed to feed off the nervous energy of the city's—and America's—expansionary outlook. Art world joined art public in creating what Harold Rosenberg described as "the American Art Establishment," and it is this pervasive blend of commercialism and elitism that Calvin Tompkins acknowledged when he wrote in 1980, "Sixties art makes SoHo possible. We are still drawing on energies generated twenty years ago, and that knowledge lends the SoHo scene its diffuse, uneasy glamor."

Glamor on the one hand; power on the other. Between 1960 and 1965, as new styles and subjects flourished in an increasingly commercial art world, an idea grew that the arts deserved more institutional support than either the vagaries of the marketplace or the passion of traditional patrons of the arts could offer. In part an isolated idea and in part an idea whose time seemed to have come, state support for the arts quickly captured the public's imagination. Once Congress accepted the notion of a national arts council with discretionary powers, the state's long lack of involvement in large-scale artistic activity—a hiatus that had lasted from the end of the WPA through the 1950s—became a deluge of grants and an array of agencies, which led to a rapid expansion of that part of the labor force that made its living off art. But there were elements of control in this largesse. Integrally connected with the explosion of state support for the arts were local labor markets. So strategic thinkers in the business community also had a vested interest in regularizing arts employment along with the rest of the service sector. Moreover, the expansion of government's role in creating arts employment benefited the state. Funding for the arts generated competing constituencies that looked to the state, as well as to arbiters in the art world, for recognition. Under these conditions, it becomes important to know the social framework in which art is produced, perceived, distributed, and "consumed."

POWER IN THE ART MARKET: MUSEUMS VERSUS GALLERIES

By definition, if not also by custom, it would seem that the functions of art museums clearly differ from those of art galleries. Surely, museums are agents of culture and galleries are agents of the marketplace. If the functions of the former are educational and curatorial—to show and to tell—then the functions of the latter are to show and to sell. Until the early 1960s, museums and galleries coexisted peacefully on the basis of this division of labor. Their respective tasks—and raison's d'être—reflected both the breadth and the narrowness of the art public up to that time.

In the nineteenth century, the increasing number of citizens who enjoyed some higher education enlarged the public that could appreciate art, or at least those widely accepted art forms that were said to make up a nation's cultural identity. Duly appropriated and accredited by a nation's rulers, this cultural heritage became the stock-in-trade of public museums, where an increasingly professional staff arranged it in a more or less encyclopedic display of Art and Progress. In this sense, the private museums of Renaissance and Enlightenment patrons of the arts and sciences were transformed, under the aegis of the state, into national collections. This does not mean that nineteenth-century museums were "popular" institutions. The British Museum, founded in 1759, did not readily admit the public until 1800, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, which opened its doors in 1870, initially refused to include in its collection work by American artists. In America, the lack of a history of state patronage—due to the absence of a centralized state—made all the public museums that were established dependent on private contributions to build their collections. On the one hand, museums solicited donations in the forms of both artwork and money. On the other hand, museum trustees, as well as, for many years, museum directors and curators, represented the typical upper-class pillars of local society. So the "best" art in the museums reflected patrician support and patrician sensibility.

But beginning in the 1860s, and again in the 1880s, the expansion of an affluent and cultured, or possibly pretentious, group of middle-class art buyers encouraged the emergence of a new type of middleman in the art market. The art dealer, like his clients in the industrial bourgeoisie, worked both ends of the market relation: production and distribution. The people who made art found it advantageous to sell their work in a gallery because the dealer relieved them of meeting the demands of individual patrons and regularized the conditions under which they were paid. In Paris in the 1870s, for example, art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel worked out a fee system for the Impressionists whom he represented, in return for the exclusive rights to all their work. By 1900, gallery owners like Ambroise Vollard were paying their artists a yearly income and, in addition to mounting periodic exhibitions, were organizing other ventures, like the publication of limited editions of hand-printed texts with their artists' illustrations. Moreover, passing through the art dealer's critical screening process freed artists from the double bottleneck that had limited their access to the art marketplace during most of the nineteenth century. First, dealers eliminated the obstacle of judgment by their peers, who decided what art would be admitted to the state-sponsored annual exhibitions, or salons, which were so important in giving a public showing to the work of living artists. Second, dealers reduced the make-or-break quality of judgment by the critics, whose published reviews of the salons could establish an artist's reputation—and sales.

Art dealers also provided a service for collectors. They sold taste, status, and expertise as well as art. By showing a small number of works in the privacy of a "gallery," the dealer evoked the high culture of an aristocratic private collection and the erudition of a museum within the
familiar commercial milieu of a shop. The dealer's prior selection relieved new collectors of the anxiety that they might feel in making an uninformed choice. By the twentieth century, when dealers guaranteed the quality and the provenance of the works that they sold, this offered further reassurance. In short, through their dealers new collectors could acquire whole collections of art without investing either the time or the effort that was put into by traditional patrons. But the art dealer also provided a service for old-style patricians. If they had to sell off some of their property, then disposing of a piece of art through a gallery was discreet as well as profitable. Indeed, the combined functions of the early art dealers lived on in those galleries where the sale of art coexisted with a business in secondhand goods.

This embryonic marketing system worked so long as the art public remained fairly small and observed the conventional aesthetic distinction between old masters and living artists. Essentially, people considered old art valuable and new art ephemeral, decorative, or "photographic." Old Masters were bought by the old rich and conserved by museums for the public's edification. Living artists were supposed to juggle aesthetic and commercial standards without making too much of a scandal or taking themselves too seriously. The few early-twentieth-century collectors who specialized in contemporary art were generally newly rich rather than patrician, and sometimes eccentric in the seriousness with which they treated artists. Exemplifying this new sort of patronage were the Arensbergs in New York, Gertrude Stein's family in Baltimore (and Paris), and Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney. The divided view of old art versus modern art supported the division of labor between museums and galleries. To be accepted by a museum implied canonization: it established the aesthetic value of an artist or an artist's work. However, to be represented by a gallery established commercial value and assured living artists, to some degree, of making a living.

Between 1910 and 1920 the pace of collecting modern art sped up. Like everything that was labeled "modern" at the time, modern art began to excite collectors as well as the wider public. In part, the attraction to modern art reflected the general current of the times and the rejection, finally, of a stagnant, academic art. But the public had also been prepared for modern art by the proselytizing efforts of a few art gallery owners, who were themselves involved in making art. The photographer Alfred Stieglitz, for example, started a gallery in New York in 1914 that showed contemporary European art (like Picasso's) and attracted adventurous young American artists such as Marsden Hartley and Georgia O'Keeffe. The 1913 Armory Show, which introduced abstract painting to the New York art public in a massive, and massively shocking, exhibition, also enlarged the audience for modern art and the number of potential buyers.

Apart from this exhibition, there were not many places where people could view a selection of modern art, so modernism remained a somewhat elitist taste. However, by the 1930s a few small circles of rich, educated and well-traveled Americans who hoped to arouse greater public support for modern art succeeded in establishing museums that took the representation of modern art as their special mandate. For the first time, new museums like the Museum of Modern Art (1929), the Whitney (1930), and the Guggenheim (1939) — all in New York — featured the work of living artists. Each of these museums developed a specific constituency among the artists whom they patronized and the public to which they appealed. Together, they generated the kind of excitement about modern art that had been restricted to the new galleries and to particularly scandalous exhibitions. From a marketing point of view, the establishment of museums of modern art not only certified the aesthetic worth of contemporary artists but also helped to drive up the commercial value of their work. This blurred the original distinction between art museums and art galleries.

For different reasons, both the old public museums and the new modern art museums assumed an educating role in society in addition to their primary task of conserving the best or, later, the most representative works of art. The establishment of the earlier museums coincided with an expansion of citizenship rights to the lower classes — including the middle class, which for the first time in many European countries won the right to vote — and an explosion of political consciousness among many national and ethnic groups. Class consciousness and ethnicity presented a threatening prospect to the rulers of many nineteenth-century states. To counter their potential for fragmentation and conflict, the leading social classes that dominated these states encouraged a redefinition of national culture that stressed unity, conformity, and a certain amount of patriotism. Public institutions were enlarged and revamped — "modernized," we would say, if we weren't aware of the ulterior motive — to facilitate social integration. In cities, where crowds and riots have always been particularly disruptive, an intensive program of construction and instruction established museums, along with schools, parks, and zoos, as part of the public's cultural curriculum. Later, during the waves of European and Asian immigration to America in the 1900s, so many new citizens entered the mainstream of American society that the public museums intensified their educational role. Together with the more dynamic new means of mass communication, which included movies, radio, and even advertising, the museums helped to process the immigrants into a unified vision of American culture.

The missionary work of the new modern art museums that opened around 1930 operated on a more elite level. Because they were established primarily by individuals of "advanced" cultural views — the little group formed by Alfred Barr and architect Philip Johnson at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), Solomon R. Guggenheim at the Guggenheim Museum, and Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney at the Whitney — they had to
create a constituency among the local patricians who traditionally supported art museums. The founders of MOMA, for example, assiduously cultivated the Rockefeller family and made a serious collector of modern art out of the young Nelson Rockefeller. On another level, Leo Castelli and Sidney Janis, who became prominent New York art dealers in the 1950s, also received their "art education" there, through the museum's comprehensive collection and well-documented exhibitions. Inspired by MOMA's professionalism as well as its missionary zeal, they brought some quality of the museum to the art gallery. "What [Janis] did was of enormous importance," Castelli has said. "He really taught me that a gallery should be run like a museum — he had that kind of rigor."

In the aftermath of World War II, the trends that had shaped the art market since the nineteenth century were intensified. Public attention shifted even more decisively from Old Masters to living artists and from art museums to art galleries. In Europe, the financially pressed upper class began to sell off their collections. But in contrast to the 1880s, when they sold primarily to affluent bourgeois collectors in their own countries, the Europeans now sold to affluent Americans or to a rising social group of international business leaders around the world. As in the earlier period, the acceleration of art sales greatly benefited the art galleries, whose dealings grew in number and scope as well as marketing technique. Through their efforts the art market became truly international. The enlargement of the market, and the more active role of dealers in it, soon led to an energetic search to uncover all the sources of Old Master paintings, the market's most volatile and most desirable item. Competition over the high commissions that were involved, as well as the reputations that were made by the hunt and the sale of famous paintings, encouraged some dealers to be manipulative. New galleries, known for their brashness or their hucksterism, sprang up alongside the established concerns. Frank Lloyd, for example, a concentration camp survivor whose shrewd manipulations propelled the new Marlborough Galleries into the front ranks of international art dealing, acquired some notoriety not only for trying to control the supply of Old Masters but also for trying to control their distribution so as to drive prices up. This in turn affected the market in works by living artists. Limitations that were imposed on the distribution of these works — imposed first by dealers alone and then by dealers in association with the artists' widows — enhanced their commercial value.

Dealers skillfully used their role as intermediaries between artists and the market to sharpen their power. On the one hand, as they mounted increasingly significant exhibitions — annual exhibitions, in particular, which were at least as comprehensive and even more avant-garde than the museums' — they took over the museums' special forte. On the other hand, the dealers' unique ability to raise an artist's market value, often by negotiating with a museum to include the artist's work in its collection, gave them special influence over this work. Admittedly, the galleries had a symbiotic relation with the museums as well as the artists. Just as the artists supplied the galleries with what they sold, so the galleries supplied the museums with what they showed. Moreover, as in all market situations, inherent (or aesthetic) worth became interchangeable with market value. Artists remained, of course, the source of modern art, but to get to the artists, museums as well as collectors had to go through their dealers. This dramatically changed the perception of museums in relation to galleries. Although the galleries obviously "represented" artists in more than a merely commercial way, the museums more or less "entombed" them — a morbidly respectful view which abstract artist Ad Reinhardt expressed at the beginning of the 1960s.

The growth of the art dealers' power hardly pleased the other partners in the triad. From the mid-fifties to the mid-sixties, museums suffered a crisis of identity and confidence, and artists alternately spurned and sought the gallery connection to the marketplace. MOMA, whose founders had taken as their specific task representing the avant-garde, seemed especially shaken by the galleries' successes. MOMA's vulnerability stemmed in part from its European bias and a complacency that its vast holdings in Picasso, Braque, and company already represented the best of the "moderns." When the center of world art production shifted to New York from Paris after 1945, the museum was caught short. Its dynamism foundered; its mission was challenged. Slowly MOMA's founders began to pursue the artists who were working in New York. They visited their studios, and they tried to collaborate more actively with their galleries. Either because they had initially missed the significance of New York art or because they found the Abstract Expressionists' ready dominance of the American art world sterile or banal, in contrast to the diversity of styles and absence of self-conscious theorizing in European abstract art, the MOMA group tended to concentrate on younger artists who became prominent around 1960. They quickly adopted artists Jasper Johns and Frank Stella, and significantly, both Johns and Stella came to MOMA's attention through their dealer, Leo Castelli. Although it was a curator who had worked for years with Barr and the other founders who made the key decision to include Johns and Stella in a 1959 exhibition of "Sixteen Americans," a new generation of art curators greeted the artists of the sixties with an enthusiasm bordering on hysteria. In some sense these curators became promoters rather than conservers of art.

The exhibitions that these curators devised around particular artists or themes, or simply new American art, generated excitement. For some

*Indeed, the museums' criticism of galleries at that time, for creating a spectacle and driving up prices, resembles the art dealers' criticism of auction houses like Christie's and Sotheby Parke Bernet.
years, a museum exhibition of work by a living artist had had the effect of raising prices on the artist's other work. Now, however, museum exhibitions had an effect on the work itself. Artists were rumored to have created pieces especially for a 1965 exhibition at MOMA, "The Responsive Eye," which was supposed to choose from work that had already been completed. Another MOMA exhibition of large sculpture-collages made with found objects (or what Robert Rauschenberg called "combines") coined the word that then became the standard term for this type of work: the assemblage. Though nothing succeeds like success, even the curators were surprised, or maybe appalled, at theirs. As the editor of Arts magazine, Lawrence Alloway, reproached a MOMA curator in 1967, "In any case, it seems to me that you put on a show at the museum and then you are embarrassed by its success. On the other hand, what I liked about 'The Responsive Eye' was that it was an exhibition put on at a major museum which became an instant success in fashion magazines, humor magazines, teen magazines, Time magazine, and so on." Yet this spectacle—provoking a mass public for modern art—is precisely what the curator resists. "What's involved here is pure publicity," he says. "And it's not the influence of art or fashion, it is fashion." 10

In all the publicity for Pop Art, Op Art, Minimalism, Conceptualism, and other approaches of the sixties, it was hard to tell whether the artistic vision was bidding up prices, or commercialism was transforming the artistic vision. Market value had become thoroughly confused with aesthetic worth. Museums and galleries responded to this situation, finally, by forming an alliance for their mutual protection. The newer galleries, which tried to steer museums as well as individual collectors toward the latest trends and to direct artists to their potential markets. 11 As curators acted more like critics, critics like curators, and gallery owners like both critics and curators as well as dealers, 12 artists simultaneously let themselves be wooed and tried to run away from it all. Certainly the artists' financial status, which reflected the greater market value of modern art in general as well as that of the newer approaches and the newer artists in particular, influenced their attitude. By the late fifties, the affluence of those original members of the New York School who were still alive sparked periodic mini-rebellions among them in the form of ill manners. When the "second generation" of Abstract Expressionists, who started to show their work in the early sixties, began to command even higher prices and more effective critical acclaim, the older artists vented their disgust with the art world in public and private statements. Despite the younger generation's greater success—as a group—in the art market, they "grew up" firmly believing that museums and collectors colluded to maintain the high market value of the art that they held. So the artists' relationship with the galleries that sold to this market was, at the very least, ambiguous. 13

Over the years, artists tried to thwart the marketing system that the cozy arrangement between museums, galleries, and individual "patrons" had established. They did this in several ways. First, they changed their product. They made art in forms that were so big, so unwieldy, or so "environmental" that they could not easily be transported to a gallery, let alone displayed there, among other works, or in a private collector's living room. Actually, artists had been creating big works—primarily painting large canvases and carving large sculpture—since the late 1940s. They were influenced socially and aesthetically, by the realistic murals of the 1930s and the detritus of industrial production that was increasingly available in the 1950s. Or perhaps, like Barnett Newman, they were painting a big idea. But during the 1960s, artists began to describe their big or bulky work as resistance to the market; rebellion against "easel art," return to the "real." You could buy, but you obviously could not own, work like Michael Heizer's excavations in the desert or Christo's fences and wrappings—"Earth Art," as some of this work was called, or "de-aestheticized art," as Harold Rosenberg termed it. However, Rosenberg also pointed out the essential fallacy in this artistic rebellion. "The uncollectible art object," he says, "serves as an advertisement for the showman-artist, whose processes are indeed more interesting than his product and who markets his signature appended to commonplace relics." 14 In fact, as the Conceptualists later confirmed, artistic processes could be highly marketable. Another way that the Big Art rebellion boomeranged—if it had intended to succeed at all—was that the galleries quickly accommodated to the new style and the new size of the work. The degree of specialization among galleries suggested that some of the most successful dealers who sold modern art had both the financial capacity and the dynamism to exhibit art in new ways, and to take their market along with them. Primarily, to meet the challenge of Big Art, these galleries expanded physically.

Several of New York's "uptown" galleries specializing in new art opened branches in the large loft spaces of SoHo, and many more brand-new galleries established themselves there. In 1968 the first SoHo gallery opened its doors; by 1975 the number of galleries and dealers listed in the Manhattan yellow pages jumped from 406 to 761, with the greatest increase occurring between 1960 and 1965. But the dramatic increase in the number of art galleries in SoHo, which occurred largely between 1972 and 1977, testifies to the market value of the new art and the new neighborhood. Where artists innovated, their dealers were not loath to follow, and the style of the galleries varied with that of the artists. 15

The second way that artists tried to thwart the marketing system simply...
involved “voting with their feet,” and changing galleries. If they couldn’t find dealers who thought of themselves as artists and actively sought artists’ advice—gallery owners like Peggy Guggenheim in the 1940s and Betty Parsons in the late forties and fifties—then at least they found dealers who were sympathetic, that is, “artists’ dealers,” like Castelli in the fifties and sixties. Although an individual artist’s changing galleries often expressed a personal or a financial conflict with the dealer, a group of artists’ leaving a dealer en masse made a collective statement about that dealer’s position in the art market. The withdrawal of several of the original AbstractExpressionists (Rothko, Motherwell, Gottlieb, and Baziotes) from Sidney Janis’s gallery in 1962 made such a statement against what they interpreted as Janis’s pandering to the young pups of Pop Art. 

Aside from depending on a sympathetic dealer, artists also formed their own galleries. Artists’ co-ops, as these arrangements are called, reflect the need for a collective “alternative” channel to the marketplace rather than a common style or approach. This type of gallery springs up from time to time, primarily among new or “unsaleable” artists. In the 1950s, for example, the New York School had their co-op galleries on Tenth Street, and in the 1970s many of the new galleries in SoHo were co-ops. However, as long as the artists who use them depend solely on the art market for their livelihood, the artists’ co-ops enjoy but a brief success. Eventually, some of the artists are either picked up by professional dealers, who are glad of the “screening process” that artists’ co-ops provide, or the co-ops themselves hire professional “directors” with the explicit goal of improving the gallery’s position in the marketplace.

These responses to the competitive art market of the 1960s and 1970s gave rise to a movement toward the “alternative space.” As we have seen, artists had been living, working, and trying to sell their work in such space for many years. As far back as 1850 the French painter Gustave Courbet exhibited in a seminary chapel, a market hall, and a converted café in various provincial towns, and surely he was neither the first nor the last artist to take advantage of whatever places were available. But during the 1960s the use of alternative space accelerated. To some extent, it was identified as a movement—“together with the decade’s “de-aestheticized” aesthetic movements and social movements. Like loft living, it was also identified with an artist’s need for large space at low cost. Nevertheless, the production of art in alternative spaces was less important in making this model—or movement, or lifestyle—accessible to the public than the marketing of art in alternative spaces. A significant factor in the success of the alternative space—as in the success of the galleries that also set up shop there—is that it projects the image of artistic production. For an increasingly production-conscious art and an increasingly art-conscious public, this image was vital. Power in the modern art market began to derive from a closeness or the appearance of closeness, to the artist’s studio.

**THE POWER OF THE ARTIST’S STUDIO**

Nineteenth-century patrons of art went to the artist’s studio as a matter of course, to have their portraits painted and to negotiate commissions with the artist. But in the twentieth century several factors intervened between the artist and the patron and made their relationship less direct. First, the further development of the galleries’ role in the art market enhanced the patron-dealer relation at the expense of the patron-artist connection. Second, the technical improvement and social acceptance of newer art forms like photography enabled them to replace painting in some documentary situations, like portrait-making, that previously had led patrons to employ artists. Unlike painting, photography minimizes the contact between patron and photographer to only one sitting, and the production procedure in the darkroom doesn’t involve the patron at all. A third reason for the change in patron-artist relations has to do with the evolution, since the nineteenth century, of the “romantic” concept of the artistic process, in which the artist increasingly expresses his or her own vision and choice of subject rather than what a patron orders. Not only do these factors change the relation between artist and patron but they also make the process of artistic creation more mysterious. Because painting, in particular, becomes more abstract, and the image on the canvas reflects ideas or states of being rather than “real life,” the place where the artist produces these images takes on a metaphorical significance. The studio becomes the place—perhaps the only place in society—where the self is created. For a public that is no less concerned than artists with questions of self-doubt and self-expression, the studio begins to exert tremendous fascination.

There are at least two additional reasons why the artist’s studio became so interesting in the 1950s and 1960s. First, in a culturally jaded and overtly political society like the United States, there appeared to be only two cradles of innovation—science and art—and the scientist’s laboratory was technically less accessible than the artist’s studio. Second, newly affluent art collectors understood going to the artist’s studio as a symbolic entrée into the upper class, a public or semi-public recognition of their elite status. By the late 1950s, when owning an Old Master was limited to the wealthiest or most patrician collectors, the new collectors learned to delight in ferreting out undiscovered artists—potential Old Masters—at the source, that is, in their studios. Of course, new collectors merely joined a trek to the artist’s studio that already included art critics, museum curators, gallery “talent scouts,” and “uptown cultured” who had begun to frequent “downtown” parties. It is difficult to say whether it was the commercialism or the anti-commercialism of modern art that attracted the public to the artist’s studio. But clearly, there was a new interest in getting in.

For the broader strata of art consumers who could afford the price of a
I instantaneous possible fifties slightly a by Surrealism, an Happenings of artist's public performed. as professor in retrospect, the studio.

Fourth was also influenced by Rutgers College in 1950, also necessarily reproduced the ambience of the studio. But an exhibition like the 1968 "Downtown Ten" actually brought the public into ten artists' studios. By showing their art in their lofts, a writer commented at the time, these artists "offer the public the opportunity for a new intimate, personal involvement with the exhibition process." However, the dealers that opened informal, unadorned galleries in SoHo in the 1970s consciously exploited its resemblance to artists' lofts. The SoHo galleries represent the logical commercial means of bringing the public into the artist's studio.*

*The sort of presentation that brings the public into the artist's studio is still going strong. The Downtown Ten recently organized their fourteenth annual exhibition in artists' studios in Lower Manhattan, and forty artists who live and work in lofts on the Brooklyn waterfront mounted a similar effort in 1980.

Andy Warhol recalls how four thousand students crowded into the opening of a 1965 Warhol retrospective in Philadelphia to see and touch him and one of his female "superstars." "I wondered what it was that had made all those people scream," he writes. "I'd seen kids scream over Elvis and the Beatles and the Stones — rock idols and movie stars — but it was incredible to think of it happening at an art opening. . . . But then, we weren't just at the art exhibit, we were the art exhibit, we were the art incarnate." 24

While Happenings whetted the public's appetite for closer contact, the presentation of more static works of art — paintings and sculptures — also moved closer to the artist's studio. Betty Parsons' art gallery probably was the first, in the late forties, to have the look and the feel of an artist's loft. Apparently this was due less to a conscious choice of décor than to Parsons' empathy with her artists. The Tenth Street School's co-op galleries, in the 1950s, also necessarily reproduced the ambience of the studio. Yet in retrospect, the Happenings' locale produced a greater effect on the public that did either their art or their motivation. In this sense, Happenings are important because they lured people who were outside the art world into the unconventional performance space, which was often, also, an artist's studio. Happenings made people aware, too, of the performance elements in modern artistic creation. Within several years, this aspect of Happenings influenced the presentations (or, really, the self-exhibitions) of Conceptual artists and also contributed to a growing perception of the artist as a performer and thus a celebrity. In a recent memoir, for example, ticket but not the price of a painting, access to the artist's studio was made possible by the development of a new art form, the Happening. Spon-

taneous and impermanent, "environmental" and object-oriented, and slightly abusive toward their paying audience, the Happenings of the late fifties and early sixties capitalized on the public's willingness to "participate" in the artistic process. So they were a somewhat more dynamic version of the environmental art (as was Tinguely's slightly later Hommage à New York) "in which all kinds of mechanically induced stimuli and forces play upon the spectator and make him no longer a spectator but, willy-nilly, a participant and thus a 'creator' himself." 21 Perhaps there was a didactic element in the Happenings, for they were created by an art history professor at Rutgers University in 1959 and were performed mainly by artists and art teachers as well as their friends in music and dance, the traditional performing arts. Musician John Cage, dancer Merce Cunningham, and artist Robert Rauschenberg had performed something like a Happening — which they called The Event — in a summer session at innovative Black Mountain College in 1952. However, the mixed-media group performance that distinguished Happenings from both "art" and "theater" came to have a distinctly "downtown" rather than an academic ambiance. Happenings took on the character of the "alternative spaces" where they were performed. In New York, the Happenings' locale included an art gallery on Fourth Avenue, the off-Broadway Living Theater Space, a coffeehouse on Bleecker Street, the avant-garde performance center in a Greenwich Village church, and Yoko Ono's loft near City Hall. 22

Susan Sontag and others relate Happenings to the surprise element in Surrealism, so that they create, in Sontag's words, an "art of radical innovation." But Sontag also understands Happenings as "environmental" in the same sense that artists intended their Big Art: a protest against the art market — "against the museum conception . . . that the job of the artist is to make things to be preserved and cherished" — and those people who make great sums of money by buying and selling the artists' work. In Happenings, a former participant recalls, "everything was itself, it wasn't part of something bigger and fancier. And the fancy people didn't like this, because it was all cheap and simple, and nobody could make much money out of it." 23

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SOCIAL POWER: ART AND THE MIDDLE CLASS

The artists who moved into SoHo at the end of the sixties were different from artists like the Fluxists who had been living and working in lofts since the beginning of the decade. During the 1960s, works of art—and working art—went through a fundamental transformation. Previously regarded as rebellious and bizarre, artists became so integrated into the mainstream of American society that they were practically indistinguishable from other groups in the broadly defined middle class. For the same reasons, artist lost its almost exclusively male connotation. "We're bohemians but we're not beatniks," a founder of the Artists' Tenants' Association stated in 1962, and the key to the transformation indeed lies in the artist's progress from "beat" to "bohemian" to "middle class." 27

Only in part does credit for this change belong to the high prices that works of art by living artists began to command at the end of the fifties. Certainly these prices greatly raised the artists' standard of living. They even motivated some artists to buy back their earlier works and hold them as an investment. But high prices merely contributed to the artists' transformation. Far more significant was the regularization of their employment as artists, which enabled them for the first time in history to make a living off a totally self-defined art. The state played a crucial role in this transformation. From 1965 on, the number of art jobs in state-supported educational and cultural institutions multiplied enormously. Government grants for arts activities rose from nearly nothing to a multi-million-dollar "industry." Demand built up to make art an integral part of "public spaces." The state's contribution to artistic careers also took an indirect form through its support for higher education, which encouraged many more young people than before to go to college. In the sixties, more artists were college-educated than in any previous generation. The success of Frank Stella, who went directly from Princeton to an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, may exaggerate the trend, but still, as artist Larry Rivers now reflects, in the early sixties it became apparent "that one could go into art as a career the same as law, medicine, or government." 28

In contrast to the original bohemians of nineteenth-century Paris, who had to live off parents, brothers, and lovers and whose financial insecurity at times resembled that of the factory proletariat, artists in the 1960s were brought into the white-collar labor force. The sense of upward mobility that this imparted to an artistic career, through regular promotions and wage increases as well as newly created honorary and administrative positions, recalls that of the "second generation" of literary and artistic bohemians in Paris around 1860. Once bohemianism was recognized as a transitional stage, mostly youthful, it was accepted "socially." As Balzac wrote in Un Prince de la Bohème, "The bohème consists of young people, who are still unknown, but who will be well known and famous one day." This was certainly an idea that the bourgeoisie could appreciate. 29

The growing similarity between artistic and other white-collar careers also brought the "artistic vision" closer to an ordinary middle-class world view. The irony of Pop Art and the paradox of loft living, for example, reflected a kind of social comment and personal "lifestyle" that the middle class of the 1960s could understand. If artists, critics, and curators persisted in theorizing, then the other college-educated members of the middle class could follow the argument—or at least, as in some art history courses, pretend to follow it and look at the Kodachrome slides. In any case, the arguments about the different approaches—such as Jasper Johns's famous flat brushstrokes—depended more on "a way of doing" than on "a way of seeing." They were essentially arguments about technique. Therefore they attacked or defended the artists' professionalism rather than their artistic vision. Underneath the theorizing lay a basic consensus about what the artists saw. They saw the same world that the middle class saw: a "continuous past" made by rapid social and technological change, the passing of industrialism and the devaluation of industrial work, and a mass production of art objects and cultural standards. In these conditions, art no longer either contradicted or negated the value of social existence, especially the life of the middle class. Instead, art found its function in representing this existence and its implicit existential angst. Far from "shocking the bourgeoisie," art became the aesthetic vision of the bourgeoisie. "Art today is a new kind of instrument," Susan Sontag wrote in the mid-sixties, "an instrument for modifying consciousness and
organizing new modes of sensibility." No longer particularly ascetic or philistine, the middle class accepted art as part of "a new (potentially unitary) kind of sensibility." The new view of art as "a way of doing" rather than a distinctive "way of seeing" also affected the way art was taught. On the one hand, the "tremendous production emphasis" that Harold Rosenberg decries gave rise to a generation of practitioners rather than visionaries, of imitators instead of innovators. As professional artists became facile in pulling out visual techniques from their aesthetic and social context, they glibly themselves with talk of concepts and methodology. On the other hand, the teaching of art as "doing" made art seem less elitist. If almost anyone can be taught to follow a technique and thereby reproduce "art," then anyone, anywhere, can legitimately expect to be an artist.

All in all these changes had the combined effect of making art both more "professionalized" and more "democratized." In both senses, working in the "arts field" became accessible to people who previously had had no special artistic purpose or vision. This opened art as a career—or as Larry Rivers notes, as a career option among others—for such people. Even more important, it opened art as a second career for people who had not yet been integrated into the labor market in a significant way. In this sense, the recent attraction of women, especially college-educated, middle-class women, to arts-and-crafts careers is relevant. By the late sixties and early seventies more than a million adults in America identified their occupation as in some way connected with the creative arts. While at the beginning of the sixties, estimates of artists working in New York City ranged from one thousand to thirty-five thousand, census data at the beginning of the seventies shows around one hundred thousand of them living there. The question of whether they do good art is less important, socially, than their belief that they are artists. "Art is anything with creative intentions," the former chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Ronald Berman, caustically remarks, where the word "creative" has... been removed from the realm of achievement and applied to another realm entirely. What it means now is an attitude toward the self; and it belongs not to aesthetics but to pop psychology." In this situation, the ultimate and "impartial" arbiter of who is an artist—though not, of course, of what is art—is the state. Ironically, then, the "democratic" definition of art as a set of production techniques, the state-supported employment of artists as service-sector "producers," and the middle-class plunge into artistic activity have the effect of subjecting art to political criteria.

But the arts-and-crafts movement of the 1970s also shows how deeply art has been incorporated into many middle-class patterns of consumption. To some degree, art sells as a pastime—the paint-by-numbers craze of the fifties, for example, or the Jackson Pollock abstract jigsaw puzzle of the sixties—and to some degree, art sells as fashion. "By the time the Museum of Modern Art’s big Op Art show opened in the fall of 1965," Tom Wolfe remarks, "two out of every three women entering the glass doors on West Fifty-third Street for the opening night hoopla were wearing print dresses that were knock-offs of the paintings that were waiting on the walls inside." However, museum attendance figures suggest that relics from Tutankhamon’s tomb, Scythian gold figures, and Picasso’s life’s work also "sell." A chamber music concert for which so many tickets are bought that some members of the audience have to sit on stage—that surely shows heightened interest in arts consumption. Ten years ago, two sociologists, Joseph Bensman and Arthur Vidich, proclaimed, "It is clear that artistic cultivation, sophistication, and consumption serve as a new basis for status and life styles in the broad middle sector... This is a wholly new development and one which has replaced small-town, middle-class bourgeoisie Babbitry, not to mention the Protestant Church itself." Yet it is easy to over-exaggerate, as Bensman and Vidich do, this "cultural revolution" that has farmers’ wives in Iowa snapping up "original" oil paintings in the aisles of the local Sears, Roebuck. In fact, something has changed. But it is worthwhile to recall the failure of the brief attempt to sell "original" art on the mass market—at Sears and Korvette’s—as well as the circumstances.

Independently, between 1966 and 1971, Sears and Korvette’s established "galleries" that stocked, for the most part, signed lithographs by well-known artists such as Picasso, Chagall, and Miró. The quality of the Korvette’s art selections was higher than that of Sears’s, for Sears also sold oil paintings that were calculated to "go with" standard living-room décor. However, the Korvette’s decision to market original art work derived from the personal commitment of its founder and chairman, Eugene Ferkau, who was also an art collector. Indeed, Korvette’s set up an art department in only one branch store—in contrast to Sears, which tried to sell art nationally—and this branch was close to Ferkau’s house. The Korvette’s art department did not really look as though it belonged with the rest of the store. Located on an upper level with its own separate entrance, as the former store manager now recalls, the department had the ambiance of a Manhattan art gallery. The only problem was that it was neither a gallery nor in Manhattan. It was in Queens, one of New York City’s Outer Boroughs. And it was in a discount store. The Korvette’s art department failed because of the high cost of maintaining its inventory and the relatively low unit profit that it produced. For a gallery, its profit level may have been adequate, but it didn’t generate the dollars per square foot that a store like Korvette’s required. It also failed to attract the customers who shopped in the rest of the store—the real mass market that Bensman and
I should have thought, from market state, that patronage was linked to the 1960s, a strong undercurrent in middle-class arts consumption has been to buy art as an investment rather than as either a thing of beauty or a status symbol. Of course, by this point in our inflationary times, those motives are thoroughly mixed. A radio commercial for Christie's art auctions, for example, features a young ingenue who says, "Yes, mother, I know everyone shops at that store, but doesn't it make sense to start out with fine art from someone's collection instead of some designer's idea?" Self-expression, status, taste, investment — who can calculate the appeal of art? The interesting point about the attempt by Korvette's and Sears' to mass market art is that, at least at top management levels, someone realized that an arts constituency was out there. Meanwhile, at the highest levels of the state, an effort was also being made to define and to mold this constituency.

THE ARTS AND STATE POWER

During the 1960s the state's role in society grew enormously. Partly this growth entailed the idea that the state should be a collective patron — indeed, the biggest patron — of the arts. Instrumental in defining state patronage of the arts were three New York politicians: the late Governor Nelson Rockefeller, Senator Jacob Javits, and Congressman (later Mayor) John Lindsay. It was natural enough for politicians from this area to take an active role in channeling state support to the arts, for New York City has long enjoyed a hegemonic position in various art markets. But in addition, these three men were uniquely situated to discover — and exploit — the arts as a series of constituencies. Rockefeller and Lindsay belonged to New York's patrician elite; Rockefeller and Javits (or Mrs. Javits) were patrons of modern art; the three were, at the time, Republicans, and so they were linked to big corporate political (and philanthropic) contributors; and all three men represented diverse groups of "liberal" voters who did not definitively identify themselves with either major political party. To some degree, their personal and political positions as pivots between those groups conditioned Rockefeller, Javits, and Lindsay to be receptive to the notion of an "arts constituency."

However, they were also attuned to changes in the whole system of American electoral politics that had only just begun in the 1960s. These changes included the decline of party identification among voters, the rise of new social movements that influenced votes, the emergence of single-issue voting and pressure groups, and the development of recognizable constituencies that were no longer defined by traditional social criteria, like a "youth vote," an "anti-Vietnam" vote, and, in the case of Lindsay's first mayoral administration, an ecology-minded "bicycle constituency." In addition to changes in art, something happened in American politics between 1960 and 1970 that made state support for the arts defensible and smart. In 1961, Congress defeated a bill to create a federal advisory council on the arts which President Eisenhower had suggested as far back as 1955; but in 1977, according to former Congressman John Brademas, a longtime supporter of pro-arts legislation, "today the arts are politically saleable. Now a Congressman could get into more difficulty voting against the arts than for." 36

In reality, the East Coast Establishment, to which Rockefeller, Lindsay, and Javits belonged — the round robin of exclusive corporate, political, and social memberships that was centered in Wall Street and Washington, D.C. — had already decided on a greatly expanded program of support for the arts. As early as 1957 the Ford Foundation had set up its first program on the humanities and the arts. The Ford Foundation's close links with other major foundations, corporations, and the state suggest that their example would eventually have an impact on state policy. Most of the political and conceptual groundwork for state patronage of the arts was laid between 1960, when Governor Rockefeller established a prototype agency, the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA), and 1965, when Congress voted to establish the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities. Rockefeller's friends and allies, Javits and Lindsay, rallied congressional support for this legislation, and another New York associate, foundation president August Heckscher, acted as an intellectual link between NYSCA and the White House, primarily by summarizing the NYSCA (and his own) philosophy in a special report on the arts for President Kennedy in 1963. The interpenetration of Javits', Lindsay's, and Heckscher's efforts and ideas, in the political climate of the time, accounts for the quantum leap in state support for the arts during the 1960s. Looking carefully at what they said, we find that patronage of the arts was involved in the struggle for power between nations and within the state — a motivation that recalls the official concern with art and industrial design, and their influence on industrial exports, in Britain, France, and Germany prior to World War I, as well as the official encouragement of socialist and social realism in the Soviet Union and the United States, respectively, during the 1930s. 37
After World War II, support for the arts became a useful tool in the propaganda efforts of capitalist states. Ideally, these states should place no restrictions on the art that they sponsor. It is sufficient—and necessary—that the state-supported art of the "Free World" appear to be totally free. Britain, which rose quite early to the Soviet challenge in art and culture, established a national Arts Council in 1945, under a policy that "was intended to show the world that in the so-called 'Free World' artists produce works of great beauty and imaginative strength, whereas the Soviet 'Socialist Realist' system produces only hollow, rhetorical, academic art official." The United States was rather slow to follow the British example. Although some business and government leaders saw in modern art, particularly in Abstract Expressionism, a stylistic representation of America at the "cutting edge" of world markets and world politics, politicians on the extreme Right remained suspicious of both abstract art and modern artists for expressing "communist" tendencies. Consequently, American artists in the postwar period began to depend on support from politicians of the Center and patrons in the corporate sector with whom these politicians were often allied. Indeed, when the U.S. government responded to the "peace offensive" launched around the world in the early 1950s by the Soviet Union, it was private institutions like the Museum of Modern Art and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund that provided artwork and the financial means to send it on traveling exhibitions to other countries. They also furnished the public justification for using modern art to represent the official American image. Among the cultural forms that received special promotion at this time were jazz and the fine arts. Both must have appeared impermeable by propagandistic intentions—jazz because of the predominance of black musicians, and the fine arts because of their association with high culture. In reality, however, these forms proved to be a subtle, and thus effective, means of reaching social groups in foreign countries that might be expected to harbor cynicism about, and even opposition to, American political and economic goals. The judicious choice of artists, and the well-planned preparation of exhibition material, paved the way toward acceptance abroad of postwar American liberalism.

The government probably spent more money in sending art abroad and helping to set up organizations for "cultural freedom," which were often infiltrated by the Central Intelligence Agency, in foreign countries, than it did in promoting arts activities "at home." But at the end of the fifties the direct challenge of Soviet space technology pushed the United States into a Sputnik reflex, which generated a massive reorganization of the state's educational and cultural apparatus, particularly in science.

For several reasons; it now seemed logical to extend the same treatment to art as to science. First, art—and artists—was no longer so political, or so leftwing, as it had been in the 1930s. War and prosperity, as well as generational change and disillusionment with socialists and Socialist

Realism, had changed artists' politics. Second, the success that the government had enjoyed in exporting American culture, and the prestige of painters like those of the New York School, made artists appear to be valuable national property. Third, as Susan Sontag noted in the early sixties, the traditional dichotomy between "the two cultures" was vanishing, so that aesthetics no longer seemed more esoteric or less useful than science. Finally, modernizing an educational system that historically was oriented toward the liberal arts required that the government work within existing institutional frameworks. The U.S. effort to upgrade the cultural curriculum— for a "stronger" young generation — enriched art as well as science, and athletics in addition to modern languages.

It was clear that some people in government thought that art did belong among items of high national priority. In 1959 a task force on the arts appointed by newly elected President Kennedy recommended that an "educational and cultural affairs" coordinator be established in either the State Department or the Executive Office instead of in the usual educational or cultural bureaucracy. Yet at the same time, Congress consistently rejected proposals to set up advisory bodies on the arts in Washington, D.C. Nevertheless, the theme of foreign competition resounded in the arguments of the small number of congressional representatives who were committed to state support for the arts. Speaking in favor of August Heckscher's 1963 report on "The Arts and the National Government," for example, Senator Javits said that a comprehensive national arts "program . . . will enable us — far better than we do today—to meet the challenge of the Communists' cultural ideas in the world, on which they are spending great amounts of money for their propagation and which represent the key aspect of their activities, which are designed to 'bury' the Free World."

Aside from its importance in terms of the competitive goals of foreign policy, a national program in the arts also had some significance for domestic political struggles. A strong governmental presence in this area could help to maintain state power—especially in the concentrated form of the modern Welfare State—against opponents who wanted to reduce or dilute it. In this sense, the growth of state support for the arts contributed to state power in three different ways. First, it justified the strong state as a defender of general human aims and aspirations rather than a destroyer of freedom and civilization. Second, it maintained the New Deal principle that the state should encourage spending and employment. Third, the expansion of state-supported employment in the arts, as well as the increasing rationalization of employment conditions in art and culture,*

*This rationalization includes, eventually, standardization of wages (and the imposition of a legally guaranteed minimum wage), regularization of tax deductions and royalty payments, unionization, and financing for artists' health insurance and retirement pensions.
permitted the state to spread its control over the social reproduction of a previously unincorporated — or “autonomous”—part of the labor force: creative artists.

The terms that justified the strong state of the 1960s differed fundamentally from the terms that introduced the New Deal in the 1930s. Unlike the arts project of the WPA, the arts policy of the 1960s did not view art as an instrument of economic recovery. Instead, the new state patronage of the arts gave the Welfare State the role of improving the “quality of life.” When John Maynard Keynes discussed this point, his terms were almost identical with August Heckscher’s. Keynes envisaged “individual and free, undisciplined, unregimented, uncontrolled” artists ushering in a new Golden Age of the arts which, he said, would recall “the great ages of a communal civilized life.” Almost a generation later, Heckscher speaks of a growing awareness in America that the society will be judged by “the quality of its civilization”: “We have come to feel as a people . . . that we should have a higher degree of national well-being in proportion as the arts come into their own.” The state must rise to the occasion — “the accomplishment of the true tasks of a civilized community” — recalling those “moments . . . when statesmen possessed the clear realization that the forms of art reflected the inner ideals of the social order.”

At this time, as a chapter in Heckscher’s 1962 book, The Public Happiness, puts it, the state must go “Beyond Welfare.” While the government has been “prooccupied almost exclusively” until now with economic issues, “at some point the concern with welfare could be expected to pass out of the political realm into the realm of administration, and politics should then have concerned itself with more interesting things.” Dealing with these “more interesting things,” the state appears “at its most creative . . . . It is then the great critic, shaper, judge; it sets the patterns and the style of the common life . . . . At such times the ruler becomes the great teacher, and imitation of his ways and his character is a force at work throughout the social sphere.” How could this appeal fail to sway a president who was looking for a national mission? Furthermore, Heckscher’s is really a liberal version of the 1960s “transition to affluence” scenario that Herbert Marcuse and others hoped would lead to a more radical social transformation. In his own area, then, Heckscher played an ideological role similar to Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.’s, for Heckscher’s depiction of patronage of the arts suggests that a strong state can continue to be a liberal state. This indicates the general political significance of state support for the arts in the 1960s, as well as the decline in such support during the 1980s.

Specifically, however, the state’s role as patron suited the needs of ambitious politicians. As governor, Rockefeller planned so many public buildings, including a monumental new state capitol and many campuses of the State University, that he was accused of having an “edifice complex.” As mayor, Lindsay appointed August Heckscher cultural affairs commissioner and threw open the city’s parks to new cultural “events.” And as president, both Kennedy and Johnson used the arts as a means of tapping public approval. Heckscher astutely recognized this element in connection with Kennedy’s successes and failures. First the success: the 1960 inauguration. As Heckscher recalls today, the idea of inviting various literary and cultural figures to attend JFK’s inauguration came from a Kennedy supporter who was working for the new administration in Washington, D.C., a woman whose family owned a department store in Cleveland. When the press gave a lot of favorable coverage to the new administration’s “cultural tone,” no one was more surprised than the administration. But Heckscher and other advisers quickly moved to ascertain whether this really implied a popular ground swell. They sent out a survey to communities across the country, asking what the government should do for the arts. Apparently the responses were encouraging. In 1962 Kennedy appointed Heckscher special consultant on the arts. But at the same time, the administration suffered a serious failure: the Bay of Pigs invasion. In The Public Happiness Heckscher offers state patronage of the arts as a means of restoring confidence in the state’s leaders. He invites Kennedy to compare himself with King Ferdinand of Spain, who, according to Machiavelli, regained the allegiance of his dubious subjects “by providing them with great expectations.” In Heckscher’s view, the new state patronage of the arts could inspire a similar response.

Yet it is important to note that these expectations are “spiritual” rather than material. In theory, a citizenry that imbibes of art and culture limits its appetite for economic gain. Again, Heckscher voices the liberal interpretation: spreading art among the masses should allow them to turn inward in pursuit of “harmony” instead of aggressively seeking an illusory idea of “comfort.” Since some material discomfort is inevitable, people should be discouraged from pursuing a “meaningless quest,” “to eliminate the last element of hardness or friction.” Undoubtedly Heckscher did not mean to condemn all social activism. But the notion that the arts could be used to limit expectations appealed to the big business leaders — primarily corporate executives, bankers, and lawyers from the Eastern Establishment — who became involved in business support for the arts during the 1960s.

The Rockefeller family connection between business, politics, and private foundations played an important role in generating this support. Just as Governor Nelson Rockefeller almost single-handedly built NYSCA into an umbrella agency for distributing the state’s largesse, so his brother David Rockefeller, head of Chase Manhattan Bank, and the family’s philanthropies, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the Rockefeller Foundation, created the financial and organizational infrastructure that an expanded collective patronage of the arts required. It was no easier to
The Rockefeller Corporation, headed by David Rockefeller, emerged as a major force in arts support and advocacy in the 1960s. This corpus consults the Rockefeller Foundation's New York-based Twentieth Century Fund, which took over the work of the Rockefeller Fund's panel, in which Heckscher had also participated. The Twentieth Century Fund commissioned a more thorough study, by two Princeton University professors, on "The Performing Arts: Economic Dilemma." When the federal government had to set up the bureaucracy of the twin national endowments, after their creation in 1965, high-level arts administrators began to circulate among positions in the Rockefeller Foundation, NYSCA, and Washington. After all, who else had the experience in large-scale patronage that the new policy required?

Certainly the business community could be expected to harbor expectations about this policy that both compared and contrasted with the state's. In general, top-level leaders in business and the state—perspicacious planners like David and Nelson Rockefeller—saw the arts as a way of reestablishing cultural and political hegemony, and a means of absorbing unemployment. While state intellectual Heckscher spoke of using art to recapture society's "basic coherence and purpose," business leader Rockefeller placed a somewhat different value on art. To Rockefeller, the arts offered a replacement for the "unproductive and aimless activities" that new leisure time and new affluence had spawned. Although Rockefeller invokes the "humanist revolution" of the Renaissance, his sense of public purpose really evokes the shadow of social control. Similarly, a 1968 speech by C. Douglas Dillon, another member of the Eastern Establishment, on "The Corporation, the Arts, and the Ghetto," says that art can "provide a voice for the youth who live in the poverty areas," as well as overcome the "voicelessness, isolation, depersonalization" which are rife in society as a whole. This approach recalls President Kennedy's message to Congress in June 1963, in which he established an Advisory Council on the Arts. At that time, Kennedy referred not only to the uplifting quality of the arts but also to the Labor Department's gloomy projections of declining job opportunities in art-related fields. Although in the sixties young people were starting to enter art careers in far greater numbers, there were neither jobs nor grants to support them once they got past the entry level. Youth unemployment, smoldering urban ghettos, a crumbling social consensus—these conditions made wider support for the arts appear to be an urgent response to potentially severe social problems. "With urban malaise spreading," a researcher reports without any sarcasm, "a small group of business leaders, men like David Rockefeller, Arnold Gingrich of Esquire, George Weissman of Philip Morris and Dr. Frank Stanton of CBS, recognized and promulgated an important concept—that a so-called amenity, such as the arts, was in reality the very lifeblood needed to inject hope, purpose and beauty into a troubled society." 45

As early as 1960, before there was a policy of state or corporate support for the arts, a shrewd observer could guess that as usual, the gift horse hid ulterior motives. "Anyone who speaks of using art to further domestic or international relations is out of his mind," Abstract Expressionist Ad Reinhardt wrote at the time. Yet there were at least three clear-cut benefits that business and state leaders could expect to derive in exchange for their support of arts activities: the creation of service-sector jobs, political donations, and tax deductions. First, providing jobs in the arts offers a relatively cheap way of satisfying social demands. Indeed, from the point of view of lowering expectations, employment in the arts is better than other kinds of work. It carries a relatively low salary and a relatively high prestige. It promises a sense of satisfaction that is inherent in the work itself, or in the social status of art, rather than the status of the jobholder or the job. Moreover, despite their increasing professionalization, the arts still lack a well-defined career hierarchy. Compared to most industrial and some white-collar work, many art-related occupations (like painting or dancing) don't have a formal seniority system, or a wage-labor situation like being hired or being fired. So expanding jobs in the arts could be expected to produce a fairly amorphious and relatively quiescent labor force. Second, state support for the arts could be expected to generate different kinds of political contributions from different types of art constituencies. On the one hand, as Senator Javits apparently reflected when he proposed including symphony orchestras and operas in pro-arts legislation in 1963 (in the Keogh-Curtis bill, which pertains to tax deductions), the patrician boards of directors of established cultural institutions should feel some gratitude toward legislators who cater to the interests of their groups. On the other hand, artists who enjoyed the direct and indirect support of the state could also be expected to show their gratitude during political campaigns. As these campaigns come to rely more and more on public contributions, artists, especially those whose work has a proven
market value, can contribute more than a merely symbolic presence. If artists donate to a campaign work that can be reproduced cheaply, like Robert Rauschenberg's or Andy Warhol's silkscreens, then the campaign can make a handsome profit on their sale. In 1980, for example, Senator Edward Kennedy's presidential campaign made four hundred thousand dollars from the reproduction and sale of work by Rauschenberg, Warhol, and thirty-nine other artists. This represents a much higher profit margin than, say, Governor Jerry Brown's rock concerts. And it looks much more refined than soliciting a cash contribution. Once the state stepped up its funding of local arts-and-crafts activities, this too increased the number of arts constituencies that could be considered as owing loyalty to the legislators who funded them.

Probably the most complicated of these give-and-take relationships involved the issue of tax deductions for contributions to cultural institutions. Here the constituency joins patronic patrons of the arts, who are often art collectors; the major cultural institutions—the biggest museums and the local symphonies—which they sponsor; and the artists who have achieved the highest market value. Like all tax deductions, these benefit the wealthiest people, who naturally can afford to make large contributions. Their tax-deductible cultural contributions may take two forms: financial contributions, in either cash or gifts of goods and services, like a wing of a museum, and contributions of works of art. The federal tax laws permit an individual to buy a piece of art for his or her collection and, after a year or so, to donate it to a museum—taking at that point a tax deduction on the new, and usually higher, market value. Of course, a museum must agree to accept the work in question. So there is some possibility that a collector might suffer the financial consequences of poor aesthetic judgment. However, quite early in the history of these tax deductions, museums and the patronic collectors to whom they were closest worked out a system for minimizing the risks to each. On the one hand, collectors risked buying an expensive piece of art and then having the museum reject their choice. On the other hand, museums risked being inundated with pieces that were either unsuitable for or incompatible with their collections. The solution was to have museum curators advise collectors on their potentially tax-deductible purchases.

Both museums and collectors stood to benefit from the piggyback acquisition process. Moreover, at least as early as the 1950s, museum curators tried to derive an additional benefit from the system by convincing rich collectors to buy controversial pieces—which the museum's board of trustees would not agree to purchase—and donate them, after the specified time, to the museum. Some of these collectors may have been members of the board, but they were more amenable, as individuals facing a potentially large tax deduction, than the board as a whole to investing in unknown or untested artists. Significantly, museum acquisition, even by donation rather than purchase, drives up an artist's market value, so that this system benefited the artist as well as the individual collector and the museum.

The higher-priced artists also took advantage of these tax deductions by donating their own work to museums. They then benefited in two ways: from the deduction itself and from the museum exposure of their work. In 1969, Congress changed the form of this subsidy to artists by limiting tax deductibility to the cost of materials rather than the market value of the finished work. But the Tax Reform Act of 1969 did not affect the deductions of wealthy collectors. They continued to enjoy a state subsidy for their art collecting by taking deductions on the donated work's "fair market value." This system contributed further to the already rising prices in the heady art market of the sixties.48

Despite the socially progressive legislation of much of the 1960s, Congress never attacked the basic principle behind tax deductions for "cultural" contributions. Periodic conflicts did break out, however, over the amount of tax deductibility that rich collectors should enjoy. In 1963, just before Heckscher submitted his report on the arts, Representatives Keogh from New York and Curtis from Missouri introduced a bill to raise from 20 percent to 30 percent the ceiling on the tax deductibility of contributions to libraries and museums. This percentage applied to the cash or market value of the donation. In the House, Lindsay defended the Keogh-Curtis bill, and in the Senate, Javits added symphony orchestras and operas to the institutions for which donations would be tax deductible. Naturally, every arts constituency lobbied to be included. Patron of the arts John D. Rockefeller III suggested that ballet and repertory drama companies and community art centers be added to the list. In his report, Heckscher supported an across-the-board 30 percent tax deductibility on donations to all cultural institutions.49 Certainly the tax advantages enjoyed by corporate and rich individual donors remained part of the bedrock of private American philanthropy toward the arts. Once again, the motivations behind patronage joined with motifs of privilege and power.

The policy of state support for the arts in the 1950s and 1960s drew upon a multitude of motives and a number of social bases, from competition in the cold war to tax advantages for wealthy patrons. It welded together old constituencies, such as patricians and the cultural institutions that they patronized, and new constituencies, including artists in the labor force and arts-and-crafts activists. The state played on the competition between these constituencies over funds and on the competition between museums and galleries over middle-class investment in the arts. In this process, power in the art market was rapidly translated into social power, economic power, and state power. The enigmatic content of much contem-
porary art became a paradoxical symbol of both power and powerlessness, illustrating art critic John Berger's remark that "diagrams of aesthetic power lend themselves to becoming emblems of economic power." In this maestrom of motivations and constituencies that linked as well as separated different social classes, a new concern for assuring the conditions of arts production arose. For this to happen, the pattern of patronage had to change; it had to combine the traditional functions of art patrons with the functions of the Welfare State. Without this change of patronage, the New York loft scene of the 1970s could not have been created.

FROM ARTS PRODUCTION TO HOUSING MARKET

Providing space in the city for artists is more complicated than it appears. Although the idea originates in philanthropy — as a payment or a subsidy in kind rather than in money — it often has the effect of enhancing property values, and so it becomes a springboard for real estate development. This phenomenon is not peculiar to New York. By the mid-sixties, even local elites in Sun Belt cities, notably Dallas and Los Angeles, planned to redevelop their downtown around an arts presence. The early-twentieth-century "civic centers," which were planned and built by earlier local elites, suggest a precedent for concentrating cultural facilities near, but not in, the downtown area. The more recent construction of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York, in the late 1950s, set another important example. Although Lincoln Center's destruction of housing stock in stable, low-income communities was not really defensible, its construction of arts facilities was deemed socially acceptable. Moreover, the amenity that a concentrated arts presence offers to middle-class and upper-class arts consumers makes it possible to charge high prices for the housing that is eventually built nearby. Lincoln Center demonstrated that placing infrastructure for the arts in a devalorized area can work wonders for real estate development. Ten years later, the lofts of SoHo provided unexpected confirmation of this rule.

To a degree, as the discussion of the artist's studio suggests, an arts presence is attractive for purely symbolic reasons. However, the history of modern art markets and state support for the arts indicates that the symbolism is also connected with motifs of power. There is yet a third factor that explains the value of an arts presence to contemporary cities. This refers to the crucial role that arts production — involving the creation as well as the presentation or the performance of artwork — plays in deindustrialization. Both materially and symbolically, artists' lofts serve as infra-