



Miranda

Revue pluridisciplinaire du monde anglophone /
Multidisciplinary peer-reviewed journal on the English-
speaking world

10 | 2014

Images on the Move: Circulations and Transfers in film

Charlotte Gould and Sophie Mesplède (eds), *Marketing Art in the British Isles, 1700 to the Present*

Muriel Adrien



Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/miranda/6502>

DOI: 10.4000/miranda.6502

ISSN: 2108-6559

Publisher

Université Toulouse - Jean Jaurès

Electronic reference

Muriel Adrien, "Charlotte Gould and Sophie Mesplède (eds), *Marketing Art in the British Isles, 1700 to the Present*", *Miranda* [Online], 10 | 2014, Online since 23 February 2015, connection on 16 February 2021.

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/miranda/6502> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/miranda.6502>

This text was automatically generated on 16 February 2021.



Miranda is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

Charlotte Gould and Sophie Mesplède (eds), *Marketing Art in the British Isles, 1700 to the Present*

Muriel Adrien

REFERENCES

Charlotte Gould and Sophie Mesplède (eds), *Marketing Art in the British Isles, 1700 to the Present. A Cultural History*, London: Ashgate, 2012, 214 p, ISBN 978-1409436690

- 1 *Marketing Art in the British Isles, 1700 to the Present*, edited by Charlotte Gould and Sophie Mesplède, partakes of the emerging trend of art market studies, no longer deemed unworthy of research. Arthur Danto had endorsed the idea that artwork could not be envisaged outside its professional, commercial and critical context. The influence of economic factors upon visual culture has already been touched upon by Michael Baxandall, Richard Goldwaite, Evelyn Welch and Michelle O'Malley, to name but a few. What emerges in the book is that the embrace of commerce has both hindered the development of some artistic practices *and* generated truly original forms in Britain. Moreover, the current discussions about corporate involvement in the art market stem from processes that originated with Britain's engagement with commerce and are not in the least novel, contrary to what is commonly thought.
- 2 The long and comprehensive introduction (30 pages) starts with how the word "philistinism" evolved, from Lord Shaftesbury to Roger Fry, often cropping up in the accusations leveled at the nation of shopkeepers Britain allegedly embodied, especially as there existed no such thing as a British school. British art theorists inherited from the Continent the idea that Britain's unabashed endorsement of commercial activity had always been detrimental to local creativity and the cultivation of taste, much to the annoyance of Roger Fry, for example, who lamented the boorishness of British minds impervious to the visual revolution of post-impressionism.

- 3 The editors provide a historical survey of the network of various commercial channels and patronage (auction rooms, agents, art dealerships, galleries, publishing houses, art training institutions, national art museums), and how they are linked with the rising middle class; the hold they had on the artistic world was to become the hallmark of the English school. Referring to Ian Pears's *Discovery of Painting* (1988), the editors recall the beginning of the modern British art market during the Glorious Revolution in 1688, which empowered the middle classes who sought in cultural capital a way to enhance their status and emulate the aristocracy. In the wake of David Solkin's *Painting for Money* (1996), they evoke the genres and practices encouraged by the new moneyed classes, starting with the Conversation Piece, a hybrid genre which exemplified their values and catered to their tastes and demand. Many academicians such as Reynolds were not averse to working within the context of a market-led art world. Boydell's gallery was at once an educational tool, a commercial venture and an ambitious project to foster artistic excellence in history painting in Britain. The diverse strategies of artists ranged from seeking protection in the Royal Academy, taking the initiative of selling their art in a collective fashion or resorting to entrepreneurial dealers, whose image was to improve as they set up their own galleries and by the end of the century, helped some avant-gardist movements to make their way into the limelight. In the twentieth century, London became a significant art center, negotiating its way along the persistent anticommmercialism of an elite group of art lovers and critics. With the Thatcher government's fund cutting, the art market went along the lines of the liberal economy. After a zoom-in on the Saatchi collection, the editors mention the first artistic hedge fund set up in the mid-90s and a supposedly conservative return to visual art and the canvas, considered more market-friendly. Increasingly, the market value of works seemingly reflected their symbolic prestige, as with the £50m *For the Love of God* by Damien Hirst (a "by-product and mirror of commodity culture" and "[a comment] on its remarkable sale" (9)). According to the editors (19), Damien Hirst's circumventing his dealers resulted in success, but this fact is disputed by sources in art market journalism, and the general secrecy and confidentiality in which his transactions take place preclude any final conclusion on his role and doings. Today, donations or loans to museums have increased the collectors' status, testifying to the connections or even collusions between the public institutions and the commercial world—in no way watertight worlds. The opening of Tate Modern, the launching of the Turner Prize and the Frieze Art Fair continues to secure London's position as an indispensable contemporary art center.
- 4 Part I entitled "An artists' livelihood" insists on what is called the "professionalization of the artist", far from the romantic idea of the artist working outside society, and shows that the artists' moves were not exempt from business acumen, some of them joining the middle or upper class for the most fortunate.
- 5 Grischka Petri's article highlights the differences between Paris and London as well as their mutual influence at the end of the nineteenth century—especially in terms of exhibition techniques—, for which Whistler was a prime player, instrumental as he was in the cultural exchange between the two countries. Facing Britain's lack of receptivity for avant-garde influences, Whistler turned regularly to France and eventually made the most of the nascent international networks. As such, his reputation, success and life decisions were symptomatic of both art markets.

- 6 Andrew Stephenson tackles the impact of the Great War and Depression (c.1914-1930), which disrupted existing consumption and production patterns, resulting in more government-funded war art, the emigration of artists to a cheaper France, the emergence of women artists, a poster and print craze.
- 7 Gabriel Gee examines the artistic scene in the North of England during Thatcherism, which adopted oppositional tactics to the conservative ideology of the times and to the hegemony of the London market. A subsidized artist-run network of galleries and exhibitions developed, where economic rewards were to be reaped in alternative fashion.
- 8 The late twentieth century saw the rise of entrepreneurial artists and a host of new dealers. The YBA did not despise market-oriented practices which breathed new life into British commercial galleries. Damien Hirst's strategy of selling via auction and bypassing dealers is also discussed both in terms of its novelty and of its symbolic meaning: how self-deriding, reflexive and/or cynical can such ventures be seen? Uta Protz also stresses that the business agents and auction houses have appropriated the tactics of commercial galleries.
- 9 In Part II, Dries Lyma upholds the idea that the auction mania of the late seventeenth century shaped in embryo the future British art world with the creation of Christie's (1766) and Sotheby's (1744). She focuses on John Bertels (1727-1792), a cultural mediator as much as a commercial middleman between the British market and Dutch and Flemish art brought back from the flourishing auction market in the Southern Netherlands.
- 10 Bénédicte Miyamoto comments on the different actors competing for the role of tastemakers and/or commercial key players, as well as their relationship. She also studies the different strategies of auctioneers in Georgian England and the function and style of auction house catalogues. She explains that even the most opaque auctioneers came to realize that legitimacy for aesthetic valuation paradoxically meant better informing and empowering the consumer even as they sought to secure the sense of privilege of the regular patrons.
- 11 Through three case studies—the Goupil, Corfax, and Chénial Galleries—, Anne Helmreich deals with the internationalization of the art market networks at the end of the nineteenth century. Partly thanks to its thriving art press, London indeed became a major hub between the Continent and the USA.
- 12 In Patricia de Montfort's article, the shift away from the single-picture exhibition to the phenomenon of the solo retrospective led by the Fine Arts Society in 1876 was instrumental in shaping a new exhibition pattern with smaller-scale, rapid-fire works. In line with the increasing commodification of the artist, it was usually accompanied with lavish catalogues, chromolithographs or other reproductive prints, targeting middle-class patrons with taste and attitude.
- 13 Chin Tao Wu focuses on Charles Saatchi's strategy to keep center-stage and in control of the exhibition agendas and auction prices of the works of the artists in his stable, as well as on his unique position midway between a collector, gallerist, dealer and speculator on the art market. Nevertheless, the author participates in the media attention she denounces when she informs us on his latest pursuits: Eastern art and future exhibitions showing a very wide range of foreign art.

- 14 The introduction of the book recalls Chin Tao Wu's celebrated book on the ever-increasing role of the corporate capital in the art market since the 1980s—largely thanks to tax relief implemented during Thatcherism. The rise in corporate art awards, the rich patrons acting as trustees on museum boards, the influential and prominent businessmen such as Saatchi indulging in art dealing activities are but a few of the outward signs of the corporate world colluding with the art world for marketing, branding, speculative and symbolic purposes.
- 15 In Part 3 (“Negotiating artistic aspirations and middle-class values”), Bärbel Küster argues that the criteria and value of originality originated with the commodification of art. Earlier on, when prints and painted copies met the boom in demand for artwork, these copies were a way for the artists to train their skills, but also a substitute to decaying works, thereby preserving their memory. And of course, they contributed to educating British taste. Furthermore, the art theorists of the eighteenth century saw in copies the possibility of a mnemonic reservoir of “mental images”.
- 16 Laurent Châtel deals with how Beckford, in trying to neutralize potential charges of his *nouveau riche* status as heir of a wealthy merchant father, threw himself in a harsh criticism of art mercantilism, turning to rear-guard models that predated commercial Britain.
- 17 Thanks to archival material on the involvement of the Royal Academy in the 1878 Paris Exposition Universelle, Guillaume Evrard dwells on the Royal Academy's impotence at achieving to raise the profile of British art, the aura of which continued to be outshone by Continental art, even as Britain was the most powerful foreign nation. This was also revelatory of the Royal Academy's diminishing influence, owing to and conducive to the decline in government help.
- 18 In the closing chapter, Anne Pascale Bruneau Ramsay investigates the consistency of Roger Fry's commercial venture, the Omega Workshops (1913-19), and his theoretical claims that art should resist “plutocracy” and a market-driven logic. She then explores the rationale and functioning of these workshops, as laboratory for Post-Impressionism aesthetics and their applied arts, and reflects on the issue of the compulsory anonymity of the artists of those workshops. They invite comparison with William Morris's Arts and Crafts movement, but not without calling to mind substantial differences (such as Fry's distrust of the socialist reform advocated by Morris).
- 19 The introduction alone is enough to justify recommending the book. It exposes the general ideas running through the case studies and offers a wealth of useful bibliographical references. It also provides a chronological survey that the discontinuous essays, very diverse in subject and period, cannot offer. It debunks the romantic mythmaking—which is still going strong—of an art emanating from a noble calling isolated from its economic and social framework, as opposed to a marketed art which sells the artist's soul. The book also endeavors to reevaluate the cliché of the commercial-oriented parochial lack of taste for high art which held fast to Britain's reputation by looking at how the embrace of commerce led to a distinctive British art history. It contends that the normative authority exerted by the market was in fact nothing new: as Ian Pears had it, art and commerce have been enmeshed since the late seventeenth century, despite the preconceived idea that it is a recent phenomenon. The book is complete with a very substantial 25-page bibliography and 20-page index. Although the structure of such a work—a combination of assembled conference-generated scholarly contributions—precludes the absence of repetitions, gaps or

interruptions, this dense, well-written book is a constructive contribution to the understanding of the British art market, long-neglected in art history, and will no doubt benefit any scholar interested in the complex links between art and commerce in the British Isles.

INDEX

Keywords: art history, British art, art market, British middle classes, Post-impressionism, auction houses, Thatcherism, Saatchi collection, museums, Turner Prize, Frieze Art Fair, collectors, Goupil Gallery, Corfax Gallery, Chenial Gallery, Omega Workshops, Arts and Crafts Movement, Royal Academy, 1878 Paris Universal Exhibition

Mots-clés: histoire de l'art, art britannique, marché de l'art, classes moyennes britanniques, post-impressionnisme, maisons aux enchères, Thatcherisme, collection Saatchi, musées, Turner Prize, Frieze Art Fair, collectionneurs, Galerie Goupil, Galerie Corfax, Galerie Chenial, Ateliers Omega, Mouvement Arts and Crafts, Royal Academy, Exposition Universelle de Paris de 1878

AUTHORS

MURIEL ADRIEN

Université de Toulouse 2-Jean Jaurès

Maître de conférences

muriel.adrien@univ-tlse2.fr