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# THE CONDITIONS OF SUCCESS: A CHANGE IN BOWNESS MODEL

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## **ABSTRACT**

This text presents a reformulation of the model that Alan Bowness — former director of the prestigious London's Tate Gallery — used to represent the way in which an artist achieves success. The reasons why the modification of the cited model seems coherent are presented from a theoretical and pre-experimental perspective. The results intend to be coherent and plausible. Nevertheless, they are generic and can differ in different specific contexts. Our conclusion is that Bowness model is outdated and does not show the current paradigm of art and its market, being this reformulation necessary. On the other hand, it must be clarified that when we refer to 'success', we are referring to a success which is primarily economic, or derivate from the economic one.

**KEYWORDS:** Art Market, Art World, Artist, Bowness, Institutional Theory.

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Methodology**

This conceptual paper is based on the book of the “The Conditions of Success: How the Modern Artist Rises to Fame” (Bowness, 1990). This book was intended to present a social system where the recognition of an artist between different agents could be understood as an advance for that artist's success.

According to this book, Bowness considered that to achieve success, an artist needed, in this order, the recognition of other artists, critics, dealers and, finally, the public. Years later, David Galenson (2005) wrote “Anticipating Artistic Success (or, How to Beat the Art Market): Lessons from History”, where he proposed an update of this dynamic after noticing the differences that took place within the art world. In fact, he suggested exchanging the position between the dealer and the critic. As a consequence, his proposal would consider as the agent, the dealer, the critic and, finally, the public, as the normal flow of information to achieve the success.

In this article, we present a new revision of that model. This revision is based on an initial observation susceptible of being analyzed in greater detail.

This observation is that, in a contemporary art world with information problems, the economic agents play a much more important role. This role is not only acting as a gatekeeper, but has as well influence in the connotative meanings that a determinate social system links to some specific objects.

Consequently, the main hypothesis of this text is a hypothesis of a general and theoretical nature. Said that, the hypothesis can be put in a brief but clear statement: Bowness model needs a new revision that modifies the position of the agents within that flow of information. This modification could reflect, in general terms but in a better way, the reality of the art world, specially but not only, understanding success as an economic concept.

If our general and theoretical hypothesis is proven coherent and plausible, the results will be conceptual and pre-experimental. Potential interested parties can test its validity using the appropriate quantitative or qualitative methods.

The main conclusion of this article is that nowadays, and globally speaking, in an art world, the success of an artist is determinate, firstly, by the recognition of the art dealers. After that, comes the recognition of critics, public, and ultimately — although not necessary — other artists.

To achieve this conclusion, firstly, we are going to describe the conceptual framework regarding the creation of values. Secondly, are going to present the key points from Bowness proposal, which are useful for the development of this article. Thirdly, we will present the characteristics of the adaptation proposed by Galenson. After, we will present the framework of the Institutional Theory, which we are going to use to justify the need for a new modification. Finally, we will interrelate what is presented here to present our conclusion. This conclusion will be presented as a confirmation of the initial hypothesis, although knowing that its generalization can be not applicable in specific contexts.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.2 State of the art

The art world and, consequently, a very significant part of it such as the art market, is not perfect (Day, 2014). There is no social and economic system that, in its entirety, does not have certain problems whose identification and analysis is essential. As for the art market, the different agents, mechanisms, and motivations that govern the system of prices, valuations and categorizations, are still ultimately political entities.<sup>2</sup> By making use of the term ‘political’, we refer here to the fact that the ‘social value’ and the price of art are obtained through its ‘social use’. In consequence, they are the result of “a *political*

- 1 Any translation from Spanish, Catalan, or French into English has been made by the author of this text, unless otherwise indicated; any linguistic definition quoted literally corresponds to the Cambridge Dictionary in its latest edition, unless otherwise indicated.
- 2 Other approaches postulate that beyond the agents, mechanisms and motivations, every system would be made up of four factors: composition, environment, structure, and mechanism (Vidal-Folch, 2008).

*social and cultural framework*, [they are] *polytheia and expression of a polis or civitas*” that allows “*to acquire and modify values, beliefs... [about it]*” (Vilar Roca, 2017, p.145; Bourdieu, [1979]1988, p.19; Baudrillard, [1970] 2009, p. 34; Quintanilla Pardo, 2002, p. 72).<sup>3</sup>

This matter and its corresponding analysis had been treated from multiple disciplines and always according to the characteristic methods of each one of them. Some of them, although not being the totality, are Sociology, Economic Anthropology and even Philosophy or Literature. Without going any further, in Malaysia — a country with many ethnicities and cultural backgrounds, the Malaysian community places very little value on objects like, for example, the fish. In contrast, for the Chinese ethnic group, it is a luxury (Carrier & Heyman, 1997; Yogev, 2010).<sup>4</sup> This social construction of quality was, in turn, well represented from Literature by the classical poet Heraclitus. The latter stated that “*donkeys prefer straw to gold*”, as quoted by Aristotle (2014, p. 284).

Once that value has been socially established, a price is awarded to that good — artistic in the case that concerns us here. This price should be understood as the “*quantitative estimate that is carried out on a product and that, translated into monetary units, expresses the acceptance or not of the consumer towards the set of attributes of said product*” (Muñiz González, 2010, w/p).

In this same sense, it is crucial to warn of the complexity when establishing, based on scientific and objective criteria, this estimate relating to the value — and consequent price — of the artistic object. This is because at an ontological level, there are not a series of fundamental attributes that allow us to determine what is art versus what is not. A detailed analysis of this topic, however, is more appropriate for a journal on Philosophy than for this one. What does seem reasonable is to express that, neither linguistically nor legally, we have a clear specification about what art is. Consequently, the referential and pragmatic categorization of art and its evaluation outside the aforementioned series of social interactions is hardly possible (de Saussure, [1916]1986; Reda, 2016, p. 91; Goodrich, 1987, pp. 63-81). This is precisely one of the problems of the social system that is the art world and its market: bounded rationality as a consequence of information problems.

Some academics and professionals, however, have decided to contribute through their expertise to reduce such imperfection. One of them was Alan Bowness, the former director of the prestigious Tate Gallery.

- 3 The translation is mine. From now on, when a text published in a language other than English, or the version consulted is in a different language than English, the translation is mine. If not, it will be expressly indicated.
- 4 This difference is due to merely cultural issues since, sharing the same geographic space, the aspect of scarcity and abundance seems not to be relevant. It is not less important to consider that the Chinese community (for whom it is a luxury) is not in a position of disadvantage in terms of income. In consequence, the fact of considering fish as a luxury due to the scarcity derived from a high price hard to reach, seems not coherent (Khalid & Li, 2019).

## 2. The Alan Bowness Model

Between late 1989 and early 1990 — just one year after leaving his position as a Tate’s Director — Alan Bowness wrote and get published a book of just 64 pages entitled “The Conditions of Success: How the Modern Artist Rises to Fame” (Bowness, 1990).

One of his main contributions in that text was the development of a scale of acceptance and recognition for artists and, consequently, for works of art.<sup>5</sup> He developed this scale of conditions based on a mixture between his knowledge as an Art Historian and his observation and experience. His proposal was intended to explain and reduce the complexity and uncertainty that exists in a framework with those already mentioned information problems typical of the art world and its market.

Descriptively, the classification presented by Bowness consisted of four stages. These could be represented in the form of concentric circles occupied — in order and from the nucleus to the edge — by:

1. Recognition among peers / artists of the same generation;
2. Art critics;
3. Art dealers;
4. Public.

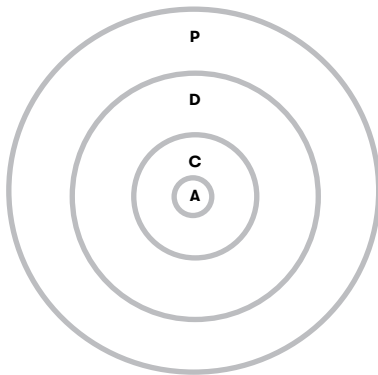


Figure 1  
**A = ARTISTS**  
**C = CRITICS**  
**D = DEALER**  
**P = PUBLIC**

5 This phrase is not intended to circumvent the fact that not all works of art by the same artist hold the same value. However, the logical inductive principle that art is a product made by an artist has been applied. To reinforce the relevance of this induction, it should be underlined that, currently, significant economic research has come to demonstrate that the artist’s name is a key element when evaluating art (Osterlinck & Radermecker, 2019; Radermecker, 2018).

Currently, Francesco Angelini, Massimiliano Castellani and Pierpaolo Pattitoni from University of Bologna are finalizing their article predictably titled “Artist names as human brands. A conceptual framework and an empirical validation”. The initial results of this article are expected to come to reinforce what is exposed here.

### 3. The model, under review

According to the model of Alan Bowness and from a space-temporal perspective, it seems reasonable that the first connoisseurs and supporters of an artist's work are its counterparts. This is because, among these agents, there is a community made up of shared activities and environments (NEA, 2016). This congregation exists before the inclusion — if it ever occurs — of its works and activities by the means of distribution that make up the art market.<sup>6</sup>

In the History of art, there are many examples of artists who, in turn, played an active role in this recognition through collecting. This collecting was often carried out either through the exchange of art works between them or through the traditional process of buying and selling them through money (Wullschlager, 2015).

Some of them — although not even a representative part — were the Flemish Anton Van Dick, the English Joshua Reynolds, the French Henri Matisse or the Spaniards Joaquín Sorolla and Pablo Picasso. To them and their activities as collectors, the Art Historian Mónica Mediavilla Pérez dedicated a communication titled “*Artistas coleccionistas*” [Artists collectors], which was organized by the Madrid City Council.<sup>7</sup> In that communication, Mediavilla (2019) explained how, without going any further, Matisse “*pawned his wife's engagement ring to be able to buy a painting made by Paul Cézanne*”. In turn, and literally quoting Albert Bartholomé, Mediavilla explained the way in which

*Degas keeps buying and buying. At night he wonders how he is going to pay for what he bought during the day, and the next morning he starts again: Ingres, some Delacroix and this week El Greco. And then he shows some pride in announcing that he can no longer afford to buy clothes.* (Mediavilla, 2019)

From a traditionalist perspective, the next stage referred to by Bowness — that composed by the Art critics — would also seem, at least apparently, reasonable. This would be the case since, from the traditional position of what the Art critic is and what he is expected to do, he would contribute to reduce the uncertainty and information problems from the art world and its market.

- 6 The expression ‘counterparts’ and ‘activities’ has been used here instead of ‘artists’ and ‘artistic practices’. The reason is because we do not know if these agents have artistic training. We also do not know if anyone is requiring their skills or if their creative activity represents a significant part of their income. In consequence, it seems risky to refer to them as creators of ‘artistic practices’ and ‘artists’. This distinction does not invalidate the existence of the referred community with similar interests and activities (Frey, 2000, p. 40; Peist Rojzman, 2012).
- 7 This conference took place on February 27, 2019 (6:30 p.m.) at the ‘El Torito Cultural Center’. At the beginning of 2020, the Prado Museum held an international and interinstitutional conference with the same topic.

Such an assertion can be clarified if the characteristics that the archetypal critic should have according to one of the most important treatises on Aesthetics were true: we speak of David Hume's ([1757] 1995) "On the Standard of Taste".

In that text, the Scottish thinker described his ideal aesthete. He must be an experienced agent in:

1. Developing relations with artistic objects;
2. Comparing different artistic goods;
3. Free of prejudice.

Other thinkers argued that recognition skills would be innate and not the result of training or experience (Heinrich, 2013). However, in this case, this affects little or nothing to our argument as a consequence of the reasons that we will express below.

In this direction, the critic would be an agent who, thanks to his authority (*authoritas*), in the social and economic system that concerns us here, would transmit greater knowledge regarding the object and its particularities, thus reducing uncertainty.

Following the Bowness model, only then the artist would receive the attention of art dealers and subsequently — and not in all cases — receive the endorsement from the public.

However, at this point and to give continuity to our argument and its main contribution, it is important to begin to break down the reasons why the Bowness model seems plausible to us. By plausible, we mean logically possible, coherent and probable — although not necessarily true. Nevertheless, his proposal presents some simplifications. These simplifications are partly a consequence of the short length of his text. This means that his model may not transfer faithfully — logically and representatively — the structure of the processes by which the artist succeed, thus incurring some deformations in the way of presenting reality.

Making a not so in-depth detailed analysis, there are three problems easy to identify linked to Bowness's proposal. The first one is that, whether by choice or impossibility, not all dealers in the art market have the same target collector. Similarly, not every collector wants the same kind of art or purchases works with the same intention. For example, according to Louisa Buck's (2004, p. 14) analysis, some collectors pay

*a grand for a painting from an unknown artist's studio. If you are a serious collector, taking a risk, you increase the value of the work just by buying it. If you are a cheap serious collector you try to get a discount on this . . . if you wait until the artist has a dealer you are going to pay more. If you wait until she has a good review then you are going to pay more still. If you wait until . . . MOCA notices his work you are going to pay even more than that, and if you wait until everybody wants one, of course, you are going to pay a whole hell of a lot more, since as demand approaches 'one' and supply approaches 'zero', price approaches to infinite. But you are not paying for art. You are paying to be sure, and assurance (or insurance, if you will) is very expensive, because risk is everything for everybody, in the domain of art".*

Obviously, the actions of some art dealers and collectors can be motivated for other reasons. Some of them could be the anticipation of a rise in the price after their purchase (speculation), contributing to the local and emerging market, showing themselves as an alleged innovator and expert or, simply, being a trendsetter. In none of these cases, the artistic good should be considered as an inferior good, since its acquisition would not be the consequence of the lack of economic resources necessary to acquire a substitute good of greater value.<sup>8</sup> However, in general terms, the institutional prestige of a local artist represented by a small regional gallery must be relativized compared to agents who, perhaps in other geographical places with greater competition between agents, do not even have a dealer. This would be one of the problems that could be attributed to the Alan Bowness model.

The second easily perceptible problem is the use of the expression 'public' in singular, instead of 'publics' in plural. This singularization suggests that the public is "*a huge and incoherent indiscriminate sociocultural group*" (Clause, [1968] 1971, p. 106), as well as organized and with little diffuse within its social structure (Watson, [1968] 1971, pp. 177-182). However, for a few decades, the academics investigated the differences between art audiences. The main conclusions of these studies show that the different publics are not equal (Serrell, 1991, 1993; Billington et al., 1991, pp. 44-63; Gans, [1974] 2008). Consequently, establishing a relationship between an indeterminate audience and the success of an artist, may be nothing more than a fallacy '*Cum hoc ergo propter hoc*'. It could be argued here that Bowness spoke of success, and that success is not necessarily a complete synonym for prestige or high value. The acceptance of a broad audience in quantitative terms and without looking further into its characteristics could be, certainly, considered a 'success'. It could be considered a success according to the definition by which, a 'success', is "*something that has a good result or that is very popular*" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). However, if the definition of 'success' is understood as "*the fact of achieving something good that you have been trying to do*" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020) the validity of that definition is already much more relative. It is so since "*within each society not all sub-groups of individuals share the same material culture*" (Molina & Valenzuela, 2006, p. 178). In consequence, we must put our attention might to whether there is a match between the intentions of the artist, the Art critic, the Art dealer and the material culture of their target audience. If there is no such correlation, categorizing something as a success simply because an artist 'X' has come to be valued by an audience 'Y' seems thoughtless.

8 For Harold Wilensky, there would be an omnivore consumption and an univore consumption being, the omnivore one, typical of those agents with the greatest monetary power. The difference resides in the fact that they have access to both luxury goods and normal and inferior goods. On the contrary, univores would share certain forms of consumption with the omnivores, but they could not consume luxury goods, being the difference between them mainly a matter of freedom of choice (Wilensky, 1964).

The third of the problems that should be exposed here is one for which Bowness cannot be blamed, either by omission or by action. This is the pass of time.

As a social and economic system — and therefore contextual — the art world and its market are not an immutable institutional environment.<sup>9</sup> In addition to internal and external factors, Art History has shown us how the art world and its market react to cases of anomalies within it: providing flexible responses.<sup>10</sup> Traditionally, these anomalies have allowed those agents who have expanded the artistic paradigm to survive through what has been called by different authors as ‘artization’. This process implies “*considering as art some object or practice not previously considered as art*” (Vilar Roca, 2017, p. 82).<sup>11</sup>



Image 1. **Aphrodite of Knidos. Praxiteles. Wikimedia Commons.**

- 9 “Works of art are art as a result of their position within an institutional framework or context” (Dickie, [1984] 2005, p. 17).
- 10 The expression ‘rigid response’ or ‘flexible response’ was widely used by the German sociologist Georg Simmel.
- 11 Some authors have called this procedure, from an iconological perspective, ‘contamination’ and ‘reinterpretation’. An illustrative sample of this expansion can be conceived taking as an example the Aphrodite of Knidos, made by Praxiteles in 350 BC. The representation of the naked goddess was not accepted, which meant that the piece was rejected on the island of Kos but was accepted in a different institutional environment (the island of Knidos). From this acceptance and “*once the message is integrated into the code of Greek art, the theme of Aphrodite totally naked will be endlessly repeated*” (Castiñeiras, 2008, p. 29; Castiñeiras, 2008, p. 104).



Both Larry Shiner and Bruno Frey already noticed this fact. The first of them wrote that “*the artistic institutions seek to perpetuate themselves by incorporating the ideas and works of those who resist them, and trying to satisfy those who resist with the simple extension of the artistic categories and institutions*” (Shiner, [2001] 2014, p. 309; Frey, 2000, pp. 17-20). In consequence, the famous autonomy of art could be nothing more than “*the relative autonomy of this structure, or field, which is unfinished and open, characterised by specific practices and reflexive agents*” (Swingerwood, 2005, p. 145).

It was in 2005 when due to the growth of the markets and the influence of some authorities<sup>12</sup> in this environment with asymmetric information, Robert W. Galenson decided to propose a reformulation of Alan Bowness model. The way chosen to do so was through a text published by the US National Office of Economic Research. There, he suggested the need to rethink, at least, the order of the second and third stage (Galenson, 2005, p. 06):<sup>13</sup>

1. Recognition among peers/artists of the same generation;
2. Art dealers;
3. Art critics;
4. Public.

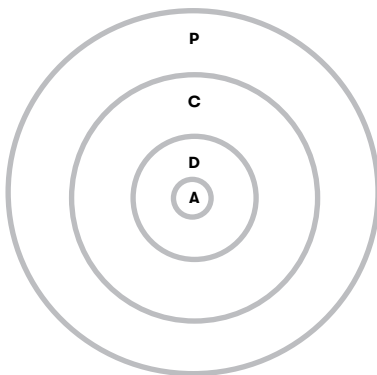


Figure 2  
**A = ARTISTS**  
**D = DEALER**  
**C = CRITICS**  
**P = PUBLIC**

To give continuity to our text, it must be added that Galenson was not exempt from the temporal handicap that Bowness or any other individual also had to face. Thus, at the time the American proposed its revision, the art market was in a period before the global economic crisis that occurred in 2008 and, the group of countries composed by

- 12 When talking of ‘authority’ in this context, we refer to that power that governs or exercises command, in fact or legally. In no case do we refer to an authority (*auctoritas*) fruit of the power (*potestas*) in the classic sense of the word, without coercive implications.
- 13 Another interesting and well-developed model is the one provided by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre a few months before, in 2004 (McIntyre, 2004, p. 6).

Brazil, Russia, India, and China — known as BRIC — were beginning to have a presence on the world map of the art market (Velthuis et al., 2015).<sup>14</sup> However, a comparative study between the different yearbooks published by these same companies shows how certain changes have taken place in the dynamics of the art market. These changes made this economy mainly an economy in which the winner — or a small group of winners — take all the market, leading to a reduction in supply and an increase in prices (Zorloni & Ar-dizzone, 2016; Fraiberger et al., 2018; Quemin, 2006; Zolberg, 2010; Rosen, 1981; Adler, 1985; Jacoby et al., 1971; Velthuis, 2007).<sup>15</sup>

Consequently, Galenson's position on the need to rethink the position of the stag-es presented by Bowness seems correct to us. On the other hand, it does not seem to us that his updating of the model is sufficient in accordance with the current context of the art market. This insufficiency, therefore, would make the model lose the descriptive and representative value that every model must possess in its attempt to capture reality in a logical and structured way.

#### 4. The institutional theory of art

To understand the reasons that lead us to consider insufficient the reformulation of the model proposed by Galenson, it seems essential to make an exposition of the the-oretical framework in which we sustain our affirmation. This is that of the Institutional Theory of art. This theory intends to answer not to the traditional question 'what is art?', but to the question 'when is art?' (Goodman, 1978). Until now, some of the main authors who have tried to contribute to this topic have been Arthur Danto (1964) or George Dickie (1974) from Philosophy or Howard Becker ([1982] 2008) from Sociology, all of them using the term 'art world' or 'art worlds'.<sup>16</sup> Quoting Dickie, according to this theory "*works of art [would be] art as a result of the position they occupy within an institutional framework or context*" (Dickie, [1984] 2005, p. 17), this framework or context being the so-called 'art world'.

Each one of these thinkers endowed with roles and identified differently the agents, mechanisms, and motivations that make up the 'art world' and its market. However, a good explanation of what this 'art world' — or each one of them — is, was presented by Gerard Vilar Roca. For the Professor, the 'art world' would be

14 This information is obtained from consulting any yearbook published by the main consultants: Art-price or Arts Economics would be examples of them.

15 Arguably, the reduction in supply could be precisely due to lack of demand. Moreover, a reduction in supply does not necessarily imply an increase in prices if they exceed the buyer's reservation price. However, for those agents who are in a high position within the art market system (that is, those who are already having some success), this is not the case, since prices have increased. It may be in part by the increase in economic inequality and by perception of art — at this level — as a credence good / Veblen good / merit good / safe-haven good / scarce good / positional good / asymmetric information good.

16 Two relatively recent authors working in a similar line would be Laar & Diepeveen (2013).

*the complex formed by artists, gallery owners, museums, collectors, foundations, art critics, some magazines and other media, and some educational institutions. Some political institutions and some patrons that have social practices such as producing works of art, selling them, buying them, appraising them, collecting them, exhibiting them, writing about them, defending them, attacking them, enjoying them, being fascinated and obsessed with them* (Vilar Roca, 2005, p. 80).

With great frequency, this social complex is presented as a republic or an ideal and moral community (Diffey, 1969; Carroll, 1996).

It should be noted that this position, does not seem so critical according to current research and evidence on how (at least one part of) this social system works (Adam, 2017; Charney et al., 2009; Buckley & Conomos, 2017; Wu, 2002; Fraser, 2005), also demonstrates a basic error: the lack of understanding about the concept of ‘community’.<sup>17</sup>

It could be postulated that all members of the ‘art world’ are disinterested agents (Hilgers, 2017) and their only intention is to find and promote the best art, making it succeed, dedicating their efforts to it.<sup>18</sup> However, as we will defend in this article, this is not the case. In fact, Aristotle already doubted whether the community was an economic association or a non-economic association with links and shared notions of justice (Aristotle, 2014, p. 232). This doubt, however, did not prevent him from realizing the fact that, within every society, money acts as a “*conventional common measure [that] refers to everything and with [which] everything is measured*” (Aristotle, 2014, p. 245), art included.

### **5. A re-adaptation of the model**

At this point, we consider the need to re-adapt both the original Bowness model and its suggested adaptation made by Galenson. This is due to two factors. The first one is the information problems existing in this institutional environment. The second factor is the process of economic Darwinism that occurred from 2008 onwards which, as we said in the same text, have led to an art market in which the winner takes the whole market.

As a preview: our proposal considers it appropriate to place art dealers in the centre, followed by art critics, the public and, ultimately, the artists.

1. Art dealers;
2. Art critics;
3. Public;
4. Recognition among peers/artists of the same generation.

17 Robert Morgan (1998) has declared the end of the art world, precisely because of its conversion into exclusively art market. Despite the value of his observation, his conclusion seems inappropriate to us because finding an unwanted conclusion does not invalidate the premises and the truth.

18 Although this would already be an interest, a motivation.

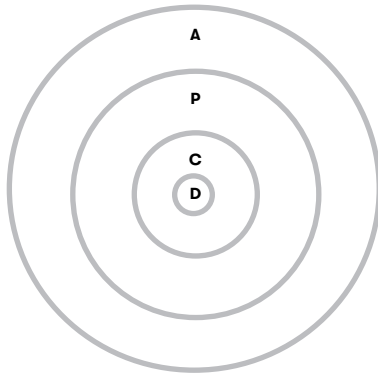


Figure 3  
**D = DEALER**  
**C = CRITICS**  
**P = PUBLIC**  
**A = ARTISTS**

This new proposal, however, must be duly justified because, otherwise, we would be acting in a merely dogmatic and not very rigorous way.

The reason for putting art dealers first is because, the number of established art dealers, is getting smaller and smaller along the years (Adam, 2019), and without them there is no direct art market possible.<sup>19</sup> In a paradigm in which art is associated with total autonomy — it can be anything — the role and influence of the distributor is far superior to that of yesteryear.<sup>20</sup>

This is the consequence of the fact that, unlike that period in which

*the guild [defended] equality between craftsmen [in the current competitive environment] producers [prefer] to take the risk of differentiating themselves instead of sharing the benefits of an identical offer [being, therefore,] the principle of risk, typical from the competition, so contrary to equality that the guilds did everything possible to stop the competition, prohibiting craftsmen from having more than one store and more than a certain number of officers, selling products that they would not have manufactured themselves or offer quantities, qualities and prices different from those set by the guild* (Simmel, [1908] 2010, p. 29; Shiner, [2001] 2014, p. 59; Barker et al., 1999).

- 19 Sometimes artists can represent themselves, but this is a residual and marginal practice in the institutional hierarchy of the art market. It does not have a significant influence, and it is a practice typically made by the outsiders.
- 20 Art, at present, is a “non-standardized communication from someone to someone” (Vilar Roca, 2005, p. 80; Vilar Roca, 2002; Calabrese, 1987) as a consequence of the fact that “anything can be a work of art. Any object, setting, action, image or concept can be a work of art. A painting, a performance, an installation, a silence, a speech, a detritus, a living, dead, digital, real or virtual organ or organism can be a work of art” (Vilar Roca, 2005, p. 18).

The famous American critic Clement Greenberg, in fact, said the same about the works made up by the minimalist movement. As quoted in a book edited by Frascina & Harris (1992, p. 226), art could be a door, a table, a blank sheet of paper and so on.

From his side, George Dickie ([1984] 2005, p. 26) realized that, if anything can be art, making art is now available to anyone.

Consequently, the artist but also the distributor

*competes by offering a product which the customers perceive as more valuable than the competitors' products [...] offering a product that differs from other products in quality, [...] design, [...] durability, taste or whatever. If buyers recognize the additional value [the artist or the institution] can charge a higher price (Douma & Schreuder, 1992, p. 129; Menger, 2014, pp. 115-141; Dempster et al., 2014).*



Image 2. **Self-portrait. Albrecht Dürer. Courtesy of El Prado National Museum.**

By taking this risk, dealers — as well as artists — expect to be the chosen ones in an environment such as the market in which the priorities of collectors — nothing of greater ontological value — are revealed (Frey, 2000, pp. 22-34). This choice by some buyers using that conventional common measure already quoted by Aristotle which is money, should serve as a first step to recognize artists and works of art instead of others. The logic that lies at the basis of this statement is precisely that the

*money has a number of functions, but the principal one is to serve as a standardized currency to facilitate market exchanges of 'real' goods and services [so that art can find in a market an] assignment of a standardized monetary value, a price (Hayter & Pratchell, 2016, p. 178).*

After the first stage made up of Art dealers and the essential recognition of their criteria by the collectors, the Art critics would be located.

By Art critic, we must also think this figure in its proper context. The Art critic, within an art market, has little to do with that typically Kantian disinterested subject.<sup>21</sup> Firstly, because a critic is a volitional agent and, as such, he has a purpose for objective — whatever this may be. It could be candidly thought that this critic's volition is certainly disinterested in the sense of having no conflicts of interest or that, happily, it is directed towards the discovery of the best art for its community. This positioning is not valid. It is not insofar as, if there are no norms and criteria to categorize ontologically what art is, the established criteria can only be presented through principles of tenacity or authority, and never a priori or scientific (Sanders Peirce, 1932).

Secondly, to think that the Art critic acts with the most well-intentioned interest is an ideal. Nevertheless, that would entail thinking of a critic removed from his circumstances, as a kind of agent alien to internal and also external influences.

To think this, with the multitude of existing sociological and psychological studies that come to deny it, is a simple daydream. Gramsci (according to Pecourt García, 2016, p. 342), in fact, already considered that intellectuals “cannot escape the material interests of class, as they claim [...] they are part of the class system and their cultural production is related to the interests of the social stratum in which they are located”.<sup>22</sup>

Although the expression ‘class system’ is commonly used ideologically and almost propagandistically, in this case this expression might be understood in a primarily sociological sense. This is because, the sociologists of art, noticed that the role of the critic, at a certain point

*shifted from the alienated critic writing art columns for intellectual magazines to an Impresario in the New York art world judged by his commitment to a specific type of art and respected for its ultimate (commercial and influential) success (Reise, 1992, p. 253) acting, as an Impresario, as a person far away from*

*the ideal model of a professional [ which] is a person who is public service-oriented. He seeks money secondarily, for he needs to make a living. In contrast, the model of a businessperson is that of a profit-oriented person who is exchanging service or goods for the money (Frankel, 2006, p. 136).*

This image of the critic — beyond the motivations that he can have and whose analysis would lead us to simple conjectures in this case — also implies an ingenuous

21 “The delight which determines the judgement of taste is independent of all interests” (Kant, [1790] 2004, §2).

22 See also: Vilar Roca, 2005, p. 21; Veblen, [1899] 2014, pp. 393-429.

reductionism of the tasks that an Art critic performs. This statement resides in the fact that, when thinking about an Art critic, what often comes to mind is a column written in a newspaper or a magazine evaluating or describing an exhibition. However, there are many other forms of criticism: the catalogue essay, the academic treatise, cultural criticism, conservative harangue, philosophical essay, descriptive art criticism or poetic art criticism, for example. A good classification of these formats and their main characteristics was collected by James Elkins (2003).

When a critic is asked to write a text for an opening in a gallery, in a museum or to write the preface to a specialized book, he will not say bad things about it. If he does it, he would end up being ignored and outside this social and economic system. The criticism discourse is, therefore, often harmonizing with the opinion and criteria of the person who pays for it.

However, we decided to place the Art critic in this second stage instead of the first one. This is because his positive or negative opinion can hold a significant impact on the opinions of the public when it comes to valuing art. It acts, as well, as an intermediation between what is decided by collectors and Art dealers.

Certainly, our appreciations, convictions and, by derivation, our judgments, can be immensely stimulated by a determined linguistic field. Nelson Goodman (1978) argued, precisely, that different knowledge — or idea — about something can directly affect its perception and, Jeffrey Wieand (1981) wrote a text about it. From his side, Danto — one of the benchmarks of Institutional Theory — exemplified this question through an analogy with sacred water.

For Danto there would be two types of worlds — the real and the artistic one (Danto, [1981] 2002, p. 68; Danto, [2013] 2016, p. 12; Searle, 1995). In fact, he himself came to try to clarify his proposition stating that what happened was similar to what happened between ‘The City of God’ (artistic world) and the ‘Earthly City (real world). This was a clear reference to the book *De civitate Dei contra paganos*’ by Augustine of Hippo (2008). To accomplish this, he compared normal water with sacred water and stated that they are not the same, although a detailed chemical analysis describes them as identical.

Concerning Art, it would be the art world itself — and especially the critic — who would be in charge of distancing the object from the real. However, even though such a proposal could be understood from the semantic perspective of denotation and connotation, unfortunately Danto did not consider — or did not externalize — the possibility of simony.<sup>23</sup> This simony is possible since the language used by the critic is a mere tool. As

23 Danto reaffirmed himself by postulating that “*our attitude towards an object [can] be altered when we discover that it is a work of art. Maybe, when we know we have a work of art in front of us, we may adopt an attitude of admiration and respect. We may treat the object differently*” (Danto, [1981] 2002, p. 151). In short: attitudes change when something is introduced to us into a certain interpretive framework.

a tool, its usage depends on the interests of the agent who uses it. In consequence, it can serve “to unite and to separate, to bring closer and send far away, to attract and repel, to deceive and to pretend, for the truth and for the lie” (Marías Franco, 2017).

Continuing with what is stated here, there is an obligation to express that, as far as preferences are concerned, the values assigned to things do not exist prior to determined choice frames. In this sense, the conceptual representations of the different phenomena have a clearly social component. While it does not seem so academic to think that artistic objects are something given, prefixed and eternal (as a gift from some divinity), they must have relationship with what makes them exist. In this case, this would be the institutional discourse, which plays the role of medium for the values and connotative meanings shared by the world as a whole.<sup>24</sup> Concerning this language transmitter of shared values and meanings — this is Art, it must be understood “as a symbolic representation of the world [that] influences the way of thinking and [...] the way we learn and represent symbols” (Quintanilla Pardo, 2002, p. 38; Quintanilla Pardo, 2002, p. 104; Bourdieu, [1979]1988, p. 490). The perception of what is art is, therefore, subject to social and contextual influence; to what the art world — in this case its dealers and critics as a Reference Social Group — decides to enact as ‘the truth of art’ in the mental and social structures (product concept).<sup>25</sup>

Also in line with what is being expressed here, an artist like Salvador Dalí stated in his interviews that: “Then the ‘maitre’ told me: ‘When this phenomenon occurs it is when I make the best food. [speaking of the mist] Behold it. I stared, ecstatic, at that, and he went to the kitchen. Indeed, that night I ate the best ‘pâte’ of my life. He made it worthy of the archangels. [...] Of course, if he hadn’t told me that, if that same ‘pâte’ had been eaten in any Parisian ‘bistro’, it wouldn’t have seemed so good to me” (Sampelayo, [1973] 2004, p. 241).

From a literary perspective, the classic French aristocrat Duke of La Rochefoucauld did some similar statement. He stated in one of his texts that certain individuals would never have fallen in love if they had not previously heard of such feeling, this previous exposition being an element essential in the future experience (La Rochefoucauld, 2017).

24 This occurs in the same way that an atheist understands the connotation of water in a baptismal font. Maybe he does not accept its significance, but understands it. The same would happen with the institutional position of art by those agents outside the art world but enough knowledge of its role.

25 The art world represented by Art dealers and critics as a Reference Group can be understood as a “group of individuals who have some relationship and who influence the attitudes, opinions, values, and behavior of their members” (Quintanilla Pardo, 2002, pp. 116-121). It can be argued that audiences and other artists or agents in the art world also influence individuals who act in the art market, as well as critics. This is absolutely true, but it is not that everyone has the same power of decision and influence. This is not precisely because their reasons are more solid because, as we saw, there is no opportunity for discernment due to the information problems and lack of definition (Bourdieu, [1979] 1988, p. 472).



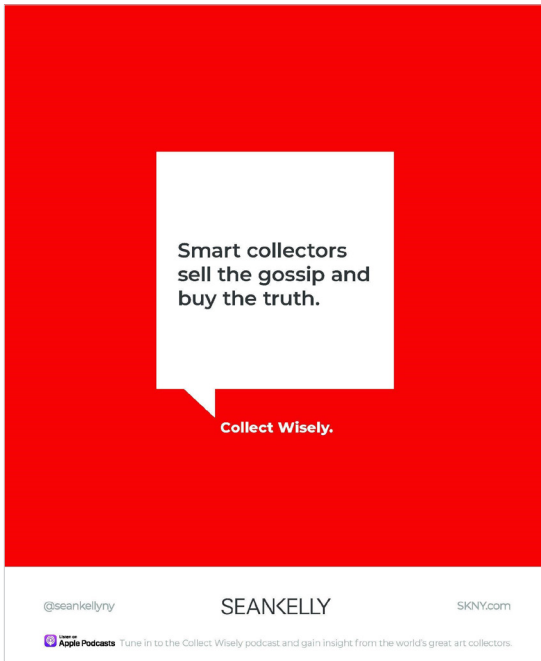


Image 3. **Advertisement for Sean Kelly Art Gallery.**  
**Courtesy of Sean Kelly Art Gallery.**

The very pertinent doubt at this point, however, would be why the critic is not placed in the first stage instead of in the second. Even though in a modern social system the interrelationships are not at all unidirectional, the cause is mainly of a logical nature. As Dickie stated, for something to potentially become art, it must be presented to an art world (Dickie, [1984]2005). If we consider the art market to be a subgroup of this art world, the critic needs something to which to apply and drive his criticism; in other words, he needs an element to evaluate and to categorize as art.

In this sense, if it is accepted that the art market acts as a system in which very few winners dominate almost the entire market, it seems logical that the critic can only criticize what it is introduced on it. That introduction takes place through those successful art dealers. Furthermore, it is increasingly the number of dealers who expand their activities by offering podcasts, education, or books, thus extending their traditional functions.<sup>26</sup>

In the public space — since we are not talking here of the private one, it seems reasonable to affirm the characteristic of one of the trends of the current art world and

<sup>26</sup> Auction houses such as Christie's or Sotheby's have their schools. Sean Kelly art gallery has its podcasts. David Zwirner art gallery is publishing books on topics of art in general and, broadly speaking, this is an increasingly common dynamic.

its market. This one is that the collectors who, through their acquisitions, favour certain dealers, they also play a direct and key role in what is presented to the critics and the public. Beyond the typical donations of works of art to museums or foundations, it is increasingly common the exhibition of these works through the opening of private museums to display their collections. Another way to do this is acting through the Boards of both private and public museums (Wu, 2002; Massing, 2019).<sup>27</sup> Thus, relating to the art market and admitting that the relationship is not totally unidirectional, it has been considered that the critic needs the Art dealers. It has also been considered that the prestige and success granted to certain artists and works through their activity, it is only possible once the first stage has satisfactorily occurred.

The publics would be the third of the groups in our revised model.

These audiences should not be considered as agents that only act in a passive or insignificant way in the model as a whole. In fact, as

*more people in the world know the importance of a work, more admirers [will exist] and more potential buyers. Few products and many buyers is synonymous of speculative [I would say 'high' instead of 'speculative'] prices and, in a free economy, the maximum price will depend on the available capital of the hypothetical buyers (Melià, 1976).*

Consequently, the publics would have a specific function to perform: that of receiving, consuming and reacting; to make something shared and commonly understood as Art. It is precisely due to this reason that the publics does not have to be understood as a mere instrument without responsibility within the institutional system (Dickie, [1984] 2005, p. 97; Silbermann, [1968]1971, p. 35; Marcuse, 1971, p. 121). Said this and, as previously suggested, it would be a mistake to think about the publics only “*as a huge and incoherent indiscriminate sociocultural group*” (Clause, [1968] 1971, p. 106; Watson, [1968] 1971, pp. 177-198) no matter how often the singular term (public) is used instead its plural (publics).

It is worth asking, at this point, what is the role of the same generation artists in this whole system and how they can affect some peers achieving institutional and commercial success.

We have been considered the most opportune to place this group in the last of the expressed stages, that is, in fourth place and in the edges of the representative circle. The reason for this is that their role seems very residual to us, becoming almost nil. This statement, however, must be duly justified.

<sup>27</sup> Nowadays, Olav Velthuis leads a research group at the University of Amsterdam on these private museums and if his task resembles that of the Florentine Medici family.

In the first place and as we have previously exposed, Art dealers are found. Among them, those who remain in the institutional circuit are those who have the favourable opinions and attitudes of buyers and collectors, who through their money, express their opinions and allow some dealers agents to survive in opposition to others. In this environment, some artists manage to collect through exchange or purchase, as we said, but they have less communicative capacity since, in general, they have less wealth than certain sectors of the population. This fact follows from the circumstance by which

*artists distribute their time in a dual labour market (artistic/non-artistic), selling their products in another dual market (physical goods market/ideas market). Artists are often engaged in part-time or defined short-term jobs so that they can spend the rest of their time working on their artistic creation. Having two or more jobs, paid or unpaid, is called moonlighting. That is, creative agents can be teachers, consultants, waiters or all options at the same time, in addition to artists. [...] Unfortunately, moonlighting seldom provides constant and stable incomes, so artists risk-averse may decide to engage in a traditional forty-hour job per week<sup>28</sup> (Rascón Castro, 2009, pp. 29-30; Abbing, 2002).*

The data, in fact, seems to confirm — without going into the analysis of the influence of each of the variables that may affect the results — what Rascón Castro expressed, at least, in the US context.<sup>29</sup> In this case, the National Investment for the Arts reflected on how during the economic crisis of 2008 the number of jobs for artists decreased, again experiencing a rebound in the years after it (NEA, 2009; NEA, 2010; NEA, 2011). In addition, that same Bureau reported that the artist's average income is 6% lower than the average of the active population's (NEA, 2019).<sup>30</sup> Even when it is early, other major art markets seem to react similarly to crises, such as China (Art+, 2020).

Thus, it seems that artists are generally in a very unfavourable position to, through money, express themselves in the art market. This conjuncture would prevent them from actively contributing to the establishment of shared values and meanings when it comes to art. Consequently, the artist as agent, would be located in the last stage of our model,

28 To avoid voluntary biased selective approaches as much as possible, it must be stated that for Frey this is a false belief and that the idea of the artist being poor is the exception (Frey, 2000, p. 40).

In our opinion, all parties are correct, although they use the term 'artist' differently. While Frey uses it to refer to established individuals, Rascón does so by encompassing artist projects that have not yet been recognized. Hence the contradiction that, in our opinion, is not such.

29 Exact data from other countries are not considered. The subjective perception is that, nevertheless, this dynamic is common, rather than the exception. Obviously, a subjective perception is of less methodological value than what in-depth studies may reflect.

30 Since this is an average that encompasses the authors of different artistic practices, this percentage can vary enormously since, generally, the salaries for architects are generally much higher than those of draftsmen, to put only two examples.

exactly in the opposite place assigned to them by Alan Bowness and David Galenson. Without money, in the art market, the artist would not have the capacity to determine “*the position of an actor within the social structure, particularly insofar as this position is classified as superior or inferior to other positions*” (Tanner et al., 2003, p.107; Harrington, 2004).

Finally, and from a merely attitudinal perspective, early peer recognition might also not be taken for granted. The Art History shows us how many artists did not enjoy especially of the approval of their contemporaries: Van Gogh, Monet, or Gauguin would be just some examples. Occasionally this was due to an inability to understand their innovations, or just because some agent with a good position within the art world discovered them later. However, there is another possibility that is often not considered: simple envy.

In fact, even if Danto wrote — without any proof — that

*it seems clear that the members of a linguistic community that we can refer to as the art world not only tend to share the values expressed by these words, but would rarely disagree on whether a certain term corresponds to a certain work* (Danto, [1981] 2002, p. 225)

this is not true.

Denis Dutton noted that in the art world, some agents like “*critics often criticize each other*”<sup>31</sup> (Dutton, [2009] 2015, p. 83). This statement of the Philosopher is inserted, almost perfectly, with that made by Hesiod. This one stated that “*the potter contends with the potter and the artisan with the artisan, the poor is jealous of the poor and the poet of the poet*” (Quoted by Aristotle, 2014, p. 218). These two sentences, added to what is presented in this text, lead us to wonder why in a highly competitive environment such as the art market, an artist should recognize a peer. Specially, knowing the advantage that this brings to the recognized one. At present, this defense is probably only a candid vision of the art market and artist motivations. Warhol defined the art of making money as the best art; Jeff Koons considered the market as the best critic; Dalí stated that he discovered that he was a genius when his ideas became bank checks (Galenson, 2017; Goetzmann et al., 2009; Various, [1964] 2004, p. 180). None of them considered that the key to their success and position was the acceptance of their early career friends. The success was: a dealer, a critic, the publics, and perhaps his peers. The latter, however, being a condition of possibility and not of necessity.

## **6. Conclusions**

In the present text, we have presented, in a theoretical and pre-experimental way, a modification of the model proposed by Alan Bowness. The ex-director of the Tate Gallery

31 He did this based on the figure of Harold Rosenberg, Clement Greenberg and Robert Hughes.

presented his proposal in his short book ‘The Conditions of Success: How the Modern Artist Rises to Fame.’ There, the British considered that the processes by which an artist had to achieve acceptance to be successful were, in order:

1. Recognition among peers/artists of the same generation;
2. Art critics;
3. Art dealers;
4. Public.

As we have expressed, as a consequence of the social and economic changes caused years after Bowness’s proposal, the economist of the University of Chicago David W. Galenson published a re-adaptation of it. He did it in his text ‘Anticipating Artistic Success (or, How to Beat the Art Market): Lessons from History’ (Galenson, 2005). In that writing, Galenson opened the possibility that, at least, the first and second stage presented by Bowness had changed and, according to his perspective, exchanged between them.

Although throughout this article we have considered Galenson’s revision proposal necessary and appropriate, it is at this moment that we have raised what should be the main contribution of this text: a second adaptation of the original model of Bowness.

To complete this, we have presented the theoretical framework of this adaptation, which is the Institutional Theory of Art, to finally provide our updated model.

In our modification, we have referred to logical and contextual causes to defend that, nowadays, to consider an artist as successful, he must, first, be accepted by relevant Art dealers, followed by critics, audiences, and ultimately — although not essential — artists. This proposal, in fact, implies a significant change in Bowness’s model, keeping only the Art critics in the same position, although for different reasons.

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