

Art and Material: The division of labour in the creative process

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Idea and organisation

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Keynotes

Wage Labour in the Service of Art: Ethnographic insights into the world of the art producer

Franz Schultheis, Prof. em. Dr.

Senior Professor for Sociology of the Art Field and Creative Work, Zeppelin Universität,
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Abstract

The increasingly evident outsourcing of works of art from the artist's studio to specialised manual production sites (manufactories) offers exemplary material to observe and analyse current transformation processes in the field of art. Empirical studies on this topic are rare and usually focus their research on the changing role of the artist – increasingly a "creative entrepreneur" – and its social representation, whereas the perspective and role of the art producers, their business methods, working conditions, professional profiles and subjective self-relation are ignored or feature at best

backstage. This blind spot is surprising given the tremendous academic and public interest in the creative economy and the “creative class”, the steadily growing appeal of this “sector” and its increasing economic significance, because in many way the art fabricator is the ideal embodiment of arts-related creative practice.

Our ethnographic field research based primarily on qualitative interviews with about 40 art producers in 10 selected art production sites in Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Canada and the United States addresses this gap in the research and seeks to cast light on the everyday environment “behind the scenes” of the art world.

The speaker

Franz Schultheis, b. 1953, doctorate at the University of Konstanz, habilitation at EHESS / Paris under Pierre Bourdieu, successive chairs at the Universities of Neuchâtel, Geneva, St. Gallen and now Zeppelin-Universität in Friedrichshafen. He is Vice-President of the Swiss Science Council SSC and President of the Fondation Bourdieu. Current research themes: worlds of work, inequality and precarity, sociology of art and the creative economy. Recent publications: *Unternehmen Bourdieu. Erfahrungsbericht* (Bielefeld 2019); *Kunst als Passion. Lebenswege in eine Welt für sich* (Cologne 2018); *When Art meets Money: Encounters at the Art Basel* (Cologne 2015); *Art Unlimited? Dynamics and Paradoxes of a Globalizing Art World* (Bielefeld 2016); *Η οικονομία της αθλιότητας: Ελλάδα 2010–2015* [The economy of misery: Greece 2010–2015] (Athens 2015).

Case Studies from a Collaborative Process

Viola Eickmeier, Dipl.-Produktdesignerin
Art planner and producer, Studio Violet, Berlin

Abstract

A great variety of production methods are now available to artists when making sculptures and installations. Apart from the familiar options to make it oneself or outsource to a workshop, a new form of art producer has emerged.

The presentation describes key case studies in ways to frame an intimate, confidential, complex design process around creating an art work before the actual implementation begins. How are tasks divided between the artist and the art producer in this design process? Is it the conceptual ideation up to the point of implementation the sole task of the artist? How might collaborative processes be perceived and evaluated?

In my practice as a developer, planner and producer of art works, the concept or artistic idea is usually presented to me as a preliminary rough draft. What follows is a process where the artist is often looking for creative input about possible ways to implement the work before formulating a drawing or implementation brief.

The presentation is intended to offer an insight into the often invisible creative and planning process underlying artistic productions of various kinds and will discuss issues around collaborative stages in the work. It will address dependences between specific parameters such as standards, availabilities, timelines and budget constraints as well as the deeper impacts of an extended collaborative production of art works.

The speaker

Viola Eickmeier graduated in product design and works as an art producer.

She studied product design and architecture at Chelsea College of Art and Design in London, the Weissensee School of Art in Berlin and the Emily Carr Institute in Vancouver. During and after her studies she began working for numerous well-known artists and architects in Amsterdam and Sydney. In 2005 she joined Mixedmedia Berlin, a team of art producers, and for eight years implemented sculptural productions and large installations for international institutions, biennials and galleries. In 2013 she founded her own Studio Violet as a multi-process studio to facilitate creative, technical and consultative processes during the genesis of a work in collaboration with artists. Viola Eickmeier is responsible for the planning and development interface prior to implementation and for the subsequent production.

She speaks at conferences and universities and in 2018 held a residency for practitioners at the Villa Massimo in Rome.

Section I: Production Sites

Division of Labour and Creativity in Artistic Production: Collaboration between artists and factory workers in the late 1960s in Europe

Barbara Tiberi, MA

PhD student, Universiteit van Amsterdam

Abstract

In today's artistic production it is more and more common to witness a growing division of labour during the genesis of a work between artists devising an idea and specialised operators carrying it out. Despite this long history both inside and outside artists' workshops, the modern phenomenon reveals some specificities linked to the history of industrialisation, the role of artists in society and the concept of creativity, as well as broader societal change. This contribution participates in the debate about the division of labour in the creative process, focusing on collaboration between artists and factory workers in European industries in the late 1960s and specifically examining how current practice has its roots in that crucial decade.

In late 1960s art, the emphasis shifted from realisation to creative invention. Artists' activity evolved toward a conceptual approach, sometimes resulting literally in conceptual art, at other times enhancing the theoretical side of the work at the expense of the physical characteristics of the object. While creative practice became more idea-oriented, artists were increasingly interested in new materials and techniques made available by industrial manufacturers. This duality is not necessarily a contradiction, because the unprecedented development of technology called for specific skills and fostered the emergence of a new professional class. Interaction with these specialists evidently stimulated artists more than learning the sophisticated techniques required to operate the equipment for themselves.

Artists thus opened up to new fruitful relationships with factory workers and artisans, who brought their knowledge into the implementation phase. In the creative process, especially when this exchange begins at the design stage, the worker can contribute content and concepts rather than merely operating a machine. This collaboration has problematic consequences for the concepts of authorship

and authenticity, questions which became particularly vexed during the 1960s and remain crucial in today's art.

In addition, artists are increasingly expected to be aware of the social relevance of their output. This requires an understanding of the evolving roles of artists, workers and industries within society. The mutual relationship between these three actors is linked to issues such as class struggle, workers' riots and social upheavals in the late 1960s. Some artists self-identified with workers, leading to experiences such as the Art Workers' Coalition in the United States and further complicating their self-narrative about their place in society. What remained as the violent unrest subsided was a greater awareness of the need for new (if scattered and ambiguous) paradigms to understand these (at least) threefold relationships today.

This paper focuses on two examples among many which embody differences in the phenomenon of artistic collaboration in late 1960s factories: Gavina in Italy and Renault in France. The former hosted Italian Op artists Massironi, Biasi, Alviani and Boriani in his factories, as well as Marotta and Fontana, who praised the workers' professionalism. A clear corporate strategy seems to have been lacking and no collection emerged from these informal relationships. Conversely, Renault established cooperation with the precise aim of creating a collection. The company provided technical resources, industrial equipment and premises for many artists, including Arman, César, Dubuffet, Soto, Takis, Tinguely and Vasarely.

All these factors and practices contributed to a new understanding of creativity as an open notion, an ambiguous field denying certainty but worth investigating in order to shed a light on the manifold nuances of artistic creativity today.

The speaker

Barbara Tiberi obtained her BA and MA in the history of contemporary art at La Sapienza University in Rome. Her MA dissertation addressed the exhibition "Lo Spazio dell'Immagine", held in Foligno (Italy) in 1967, when artists from different backgrounds showed their "plastic-spatial" environments.

In September 2019 she started her PhD at the University of Amsterdam under the supervision of Prof. Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes and Dr Arnold Witte. This research analyses the phenomenon of collaboration between artists and workers in European industries in the 1960s, placing it in the historical context and with a focus on the evolving concept of creativity. She has been awarded a three-month research grant by the German Centre for Art History (DFK Paris), where she will study the Renault Art Collection. Afterwards she will be 2020 Predoctoral Fellow at the Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max Planck Institute in Rome, where she will examine the relationship between the artistic and industrial sectors in Italy in the 1960s with case studies on Gavina and Italsider.

She writes on contemporary art issues for various Italian and international academic journals. She has worked in foundations and art galleries such as VOLUME!, Fondazione Pastificio Cerere and Fondazione Baruchello. She was a research assistant at the Collezione Jacorossi under the supervision of Enrico Crispolti. Her current research interests include the art of the 1960s and 1970s, Arte Povera, environments, and the relationship between art and industry.

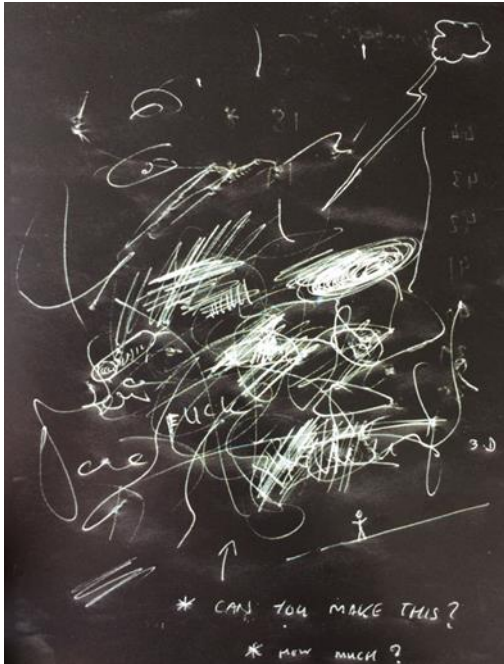
“Can you make this? How much? When?” – How production sites and their clients define themselves today

Hanna Baro, MA

Doctoral student at the Institute of Art and Visual History, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

Abstract

The shapes, scratchings and deletions on the dark background are hard to make out, but the sentences are clear: “Can you make this? How much? When?” These three short questions could be seen as emblematic for the many commissions given by contemporary artists to external production



Ill. from: *Making Art Work: The Mike Smith Studio*, ed. by Patsy Craig, London 2003, p. 33.

sites to implement their designs and ideas. The paper draws on two case studies to discuss why the collaboration between the designing artist and the implementing workshop is by no means as one-sided these days as the above questions might suggest. The barely decipherable sketch comes from one of the best-known production sites of contemporary art in England, the Mike Smith Studio in London. Mike Smith, a trained artist of the Young British Artists generation, now makes works for artists like Mona Hatoum, Rachel Whiteread, Doug Aitken and others. Noack, by contrast, is an old-established foundry in Berlin that has been producing art for four generations and still applies traditional techniques like the lost wax process and sand casting to make sculptures, although it now uses the latest 3D techniques to create models.

Concrete examples illustrate the extent to which the founders and managers of these two different production sites (Smith and Noack) see or saw themselves as

“artists” or “collaborators” in their partnership or division of labour with the artists behind the commissions. In some production processes, the division of labour cannot always be precisely demarcated, but this very ambivalence between the fabricator and the artist, between traditional craft and cutting-edge technology, raises fascinating questions about collaboration, cooperation, the division of labour, terms of employment and the self-definition of the participants, and this paper will explore them.

The speaker

Hanna Baro studied art history, English language & literature and museum & curatorial studies in Heidelberg and Melbourne (MA thesis on art techniques and materiality in Italian canvas painting around 1500) and is pursuing a doctoral dissertation on transience and temporality in 20th- and 21st-century art at the Humboldt University in Berlin. From 2012 to 2016 she held a Pre-Doc Fellowship at the Institute of Art History in Florence – Max Planck Institute, and from 2016 to 2019 she was a research assistant in the Institute of Art History at Heinrich Heine University in Düsseldorf. She has been a fellow at the MaxNetAging Research School of the Max-Planck-Gesellschaft (2012–2015) and a member of the DFG-Graduiertenkolleg “Materialität und Produktion” in Düsseldorf (2015–2018).

The Fabrication Process at the Sankt Gallen Art Foundry: Urs Fischer and Hansjürg Buchmeier

Gabriel Grossert, MA

Applicant for a doctoral grant from the Swiss National Science Foundation

Abstract

To better understand the fabrication process at the art foundry in Sankt Gallen we shall consider two series of works made by this company.

Analysis of the *Big Clay* sculptures by the artist Urs Fischer will plunge us into the current scenario of major globalised art projects. Coordinated by the Sankt Gallen foundry but carried out in China, this project is a complex exercise in cooperation that raises questions about the functions of the artist. To help frame the issues around this practice, we will refer to the activities of the celebrated French foundry Barbedienne and the organisation of production by the artist Bertel Thorvaldsen in the 19th century.

The second case study, aligned to marginal spheres, counterbalances the first. Hansjürg Buchmeier is far removed from the globalised, finance-driven art world where Urs Fischer operates. His collaboration with the Sankt Gallen foundry, the distribution context for his works but also his creative motivations reveal a different approach to collective production.

The two examples examine how the division of labour is expressed in the fabrication of art works while demonstrating how today's production site is becoming a laboratory of art.

The speaker

Born in Paris and raised in Basel, Gabriel Grossert recently graduated in art history in Neuchâtel with a paper on the conditions of production for works of contemporary art. He has been improving his insights into the practice of art history at the art museum in La Chaux-de-Fonds and through a research project on the artist Urs alias Frédéric Studer for the University of Lausanne and the foundation Ateliers d'Artiste, which was based in a diversity of museum institutions (Musée Jenisch, Musée historique Lausanne and Fondation Ateliers d'Artiste). Alongside this he plays a committed part in various cultural events, notably film festivals (LUFF, NIFFF, R7AL).

He is currently involved in various exhibition projects while drawing up his application for a doctoral scholarship from the Swiss National Science Foundation (with Prof. Julia Gelshorn).

Section II.1: Classical Forms of Coproduction

The Masons' Lost Art

Rachel Sabino, postgraduate diploma in restoration

Objects & sculpture conservator, Art Institute of Chicago

Abstract

This paper describes the wholesale restoration of Adoration of the Shepherds, the Art Institute of Chicago's monumental sixteenth-century glazed terracotta altarpiece by the Florentine firm of Benedetto and Santi Buglioni – arch-rival of the better-known della Robbia family. At first glance, the materiality of ceramic with its specific, almost prosaic, condition issues and the types of questions

raised during the course of such a treatment would seem a world apart from those faced by conservators of contemporary art: no finite lifespan for the primary material; no mystery as to the fabrication methods; no significant impact on value as a result of the intervention.

However, designing the composition and fabricating the ceramic segments were only one phase of production. Supplemental personnel and a division of labour, about which virtually nothing is known, was required to realize the entire commission. The dearth of knowledge about the materials, working practices, and contractual arrangements of the related professionals who collaborated with the artists to implement their designs, namely stone masons, brick and block masons, material suppliers, architects, and other laborers, presented nearly insurmountable challenges to the conservation of the altarpiece.

From within this void an endless series of questions emerged. How did the masons accommodate the irregularities and anomalies that are natural features of the firing process? How far were the ceramic segments placed from one another, and what was the nature of the mortar used between them? Were the masons given a great deal of latitude in making these in-situ decisions or were strict parameters enforced? To what extent was it possible to extrapolate their working methods from the physical evidence remaining on the segments? How crucial was the masonry itself in determining the altarpiece's final appearance?

The knowledge gap around these ancillary but no less essential technical aspects of the work forced inevitable compromises. How to arrange the segments, devoid of their original context and secondary workmanship, without imposing personal judgments or creating a false presentation? How to deal with warped and distorted segments without benefit of mortar? How to sidestep or at least not actively contradict the series of choices that the original craftsmen and masons made? This paper will demonstrate that as a result of these recent treatment decisions made in a vacuum of information, the altarpiece is now subject to the exact same implications for authorship and authenticity as might a contemporary work commissioned centuries later.

The speaker

Rachel C. Sabino, objects conservator, has been at the Art Institute of Chicago since 2011. Previously, Rachel held positions at the National Gallery, London; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Chicago Conservation Center. She also directed private practices in both Zurich and London. She has undertaken internships at The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the J. Paul Getty Museum and a sabbatical at the Corning Museum of Glass. She earned a BA in Art History from Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas, a postgraduate diploma in Conservation and Restoration from West Dean College / University of Sussex, and a certificate in conservation of marine archaeology from the Institute of Nautical Archaeology.

Traditional Craft, Material Know-How or Technical Narrative: On divisions of labour in the production of glass art

Henrike Haug, Dr. phil.

Junior professor of art studies, Seminar for Art and Art Studies, TU Dortmund

Abstract

Drawing on the oeuvre of Julius Weiland (*1971) and the work of the Berlin Glass Studio (Berlin Glas e.V. & Berlin Art Glas), the paper discusses how contemporary glass art is navigating positions between traditional craft, material know-how and technical narratives. In the 17th and 18th centuries, glass art was still determined by the technical potential of glass production and of shaping procedures, and hence by an implementing artist, but from the 19th century this changed fundamentally. Since that point designs by artists have widely been implemented in a division of labour, with specialised “artisans” working side by side with the designing “artists” based on a clear hierarchy (reinforced by art history research) where a focus on *inventio* and the devaluation of *executio* reflected conventional rules of art theory. One consequence was that little attention was paid to processes of negotiation, exchange and adaptation between the designing and implementing artists or to the laws of the material and the traditions of the craft, although all these aspects take effect in the work in the spirit of Edward Sampson’s acting ensemble.

Julius Weiland – who was the artist in residence at Berlin Glas e.V. in 2017 and since 2019 has run the glass course at the University of the Arts and Weissensee Art School, both in Berlin – is a modern glass artist with a great affinity for traditional craft skills. Nevertheless, he commissions others to implement for him. Some of his works, such as *breathe in – breathe out* with its filigree forms resembling alveoli, reflect the processes underlying their genesis; in others he references the affinity between glass art and applied alchemy (constantly testing the limits of the material). These contradictions between working closely with the material, reflecting craft traditions and exploring the processes in the artist’s own work while outsourcing the physical implementation of the art offer great analytical potential for the questions outlined in the CFP “Art and Material II: The division of labour in the creative process”.

The speaker

Henrike Haug studied art history, classical archaeology and medieval history in Berlin and Pisa. From 2003 she was a research assistant at the Institute of Art History in Florence (MPI). She received her doctorate in 2009 at the Humboldt Universität zu Berlin (*Annales Ianuenses: Places and Media of Historical Memory in Medieval Genoa*), then worked as a research assistant at the TU Berlin in the Seminar for Art Studies and Historical Town Planning. Since 2011 she has been engaged in a research project with Prof. Magdalena Bushart on “Interdependences: Arts and Art Techniques”. Since 2017 she has been a junior professor in the field of art studies at the Seminar for Art and Art Studies at TU Dortmund, where she obtained her habilitation in 2019 for the dissertation *imitatio/artificium: Goldsmith Art and the Observation of Nature in the 16th century*.