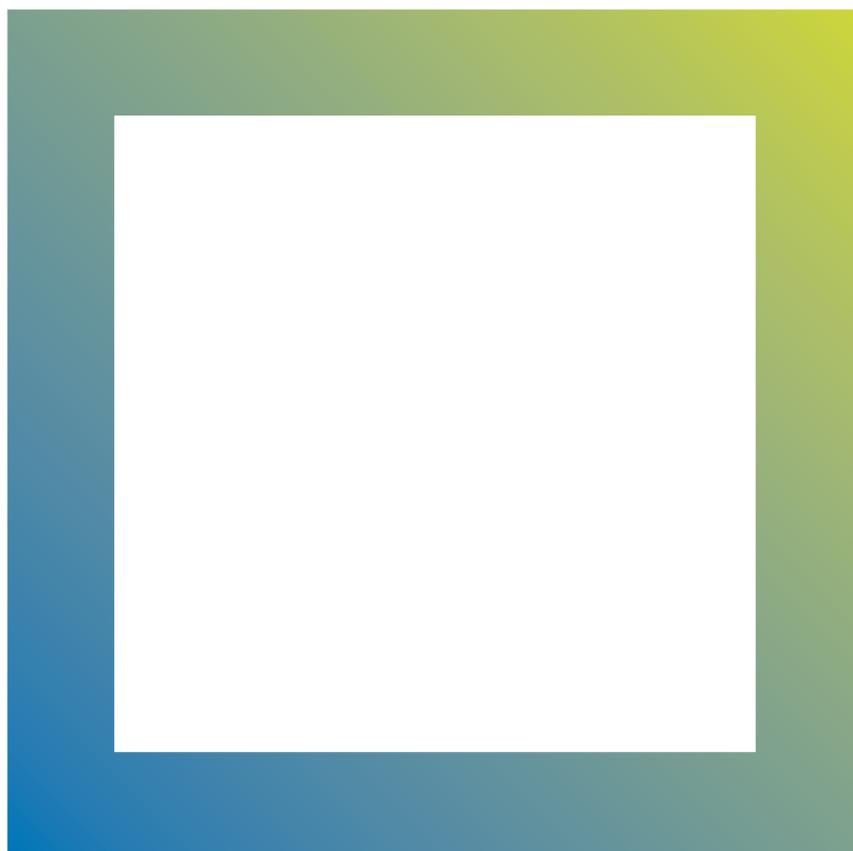


# DADA 2035

**28 PROSPECTIVE SCENARIOS FOR THE FUTURE OF ARTISTS IN 2035:  
A STRATEGIC OVERVIEW**

**FRÉDÉRIC MARTEL, June 2025**

***Working Papers on Cultural Policy*  
Zurich Centre for Creative Economies (ZCCE)**



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# Summary

This « Dada 2035 » study examines the forthcoming transformations within the artistic sphere by the year 2035, focusing on three major and interrelated transitions: the digital, the ecological, and the sociopolitical. It not only analyzes these evolutions but also interrogates their future trajectories. Digital technologies – including NFTs, generative artificial intelligence, and the metaverse – are profoundly reshaping artistic creation and intellectual property regimes, raising critical questions about the role and agency of artists in a technology-dominated environment. Ecological imperatives are prompting a re-evaluation of artistic practices, with growing emphasis on sustainable production methods and environmentally engaged content. Concurrently, sociopolitical disruptions – marked by the ascent of illiberal regimes and heightened cultural polarization in the age of Donald Trump – are transforming the discursive frameworks and material resources available to artists. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative interviews, quantitative analysis, and detailed case studies, the research delineates 28 scenarios outlining potential futures for artistic practice. These scenarios underscore emerging challenges, systemic risks, and unprecedented opportunities for creativity and innovation. Ultimately, the study proposes that the evolving relationship between art, distraction, and creation will be fundamentally redefined in the dual context of algorithmic governance and the Anthropocene. These scenarios will also have consequences for art schools, and this question is the subject of the final conclusion of the study.

# Methodology & Sources

This article by the Zurich Centre for Creative Economies (ZCCE) at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) is built on a threefold methodology. The qualitative part of the report is based essentially on three types of sources: firstly, more than a hundred first-hand qualitative interviews, conducted between 2023 and 2025, with artists, managers of cultural institutions, designers and public policy experts in fifteen, mainly European, countries. These included "stars" such as Scott Rothkopf, director of the Whitney Museum in New York, Swiss curator Hans Ulrich Obrist or Bernard Blistène, former director of the Modern Museum in Pompidou who is now the head of the important program "Mondes nouveaux"; but we also interviewed many lesser-known artists or art school students. For example, we invited the students of the "Ecole des Beaux Arts" in Paris to take part in our discussion: asked to draft a proposal and develop an idea related to "art and the artist in 2035", dozens of them sent us written responses, which we use in this article. (The complete list of interviews conducted appears at the end of this article).

These interviews and field studies are supplemented by a review of existing scientific literature (secondary sources): a wide selection of quantitative studies, which are cited throughout the text and in the bibliography, as well as numerous books, reports and academic or more generalized articles.

Finally, the last type of source is made up of models, research and case studies based on the work of the ZCCE. Thus, this article draws in particular on four lengthy field studies carried out for the ZHdK University (ZCCE) on cultural policy in the cities of Frankfurt, Lugano, San Sebastian and Geneva (Martel, 2020c, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d, 2023; Peter, 2022). I would like to thank Professor Christoph Weckerle and researcher Roman Page for their constant help in carrying out this research. These models and sources can be consulted on the ZCCE website: [www.creativeeconomies.com](http://www.creativeeconomies.com) (see the sections: Data, Analysis and Review).

In conclusion, it should be pointed out that this research involves risks of error, scientific bias and over-generalization, since foresight is always difficult to achieve, especially in the arts. However, we felt it necessary to take this risk, as the context of 2025 (the AI-induced acceleration of digital processes across sectors, the compounding severity of the climate and ecological crisis, trumpism) imposes it on us. And we felt it was all the more important to carry out this research because many players in cultural policy field, such as the Federal Office of Culture (FOC) in Switzerland, the Ministère de la Culture in France, ELIA (the European network of art schools in higher education) and the ZHdK, are wondering about the transformations underway in the arts sector, and are asking for this type of forward-looking article. This study aims to provide some initial answers.

Prof. / Dr. Frédéric Martel (ZHdK/ZCCE)

KEYWORDS : CULTURAL POLICY; ART; ARTISTS; BUSINESS MODELS; CURATION; ECOLOGY; DIGITAL; DIGITIZATION; AI; ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE; ILLIBERALISM.

# 1. Introduction

*"I write these lines at a time when the world poses to a writer a fatal question for all forms of artistic expression: the question of futility."*

Romain Gary, *Vie et mort d'Emile Ajar* (1981).

Artistic life is in a state of flux – as it always has been. Following the profound transformations of the 19th and 20th centuries, it is undergoing yet another period of change. However, many contemporary artists regard the current shift as more fundamental, more consequential, or perhaps more unprecedented than those that came before.

Why is that? It's because today's art worlds are being buffeted by opposing winds. The artists' boat is sailing through these troubled waters, with no way of knowing whether the storm will be temporary or more lasting. Above all, the mutation is the result of three simultaneous transitions, which come together here or stand apart there, but whose cumulative effects herald a strong storm.

At the heart of this multi-factorial mutation, three phenomena come together, without it necessarily being possible to determine which is the most structuring: the *digital transition*, which dates back to the very end of the last century; the *ecological transition*, which became mainstream in the 2010s; and finally, what might be called *the disconnect between elites and "the people"*, which is one of the causes of the political shift underway in Western countries and the rise of illiberal regimes and Trumpism.

The artist of 2025 is already immersed in these issues, which are modifying his work and its reception by the public. Inevitably, his future in 2035 will depend on the evolution of these three ongoing mutations and a few others.

Scientific literature is generally not very predictive (for understandable reasons, as science is there to give an account of what was or to explain what is, rarely to predict the future). And whatever one thinks of the phenomenal power of AI, it too is not very predictive! In the field of art, researchers are even more cautious, since no one has predicted the great artistic movements of the past (the Impressionists, the Zutists, Dada, the Surrealists, Marcel Duchamp, Pop Art's Andywarholism etc.) – and often these movements were named after the fact, analyzed retrospectively. Foresight, therefore, does

not have a good press, and even less so in art.

This article takes that risk. Using a mixed qualitative and quantitative method, it attempts to make hypotheses and forecasts, taking into account several current mutations which, if they concern digital technology, ecology and populism in particular, are not limited to them.

Why 2035? It would have been possible to choose another timeframe, such as 2049 or 2077 – to be more in line with the cyberpunk movement (and its insistent references to these futures, as in the film *Blade Runner 2049* or in the video game *Cyberpunk 2077* [Lucas, 2020]). However, the artistic condition and art worlds have changed so much since 2000 that it seems rather presumptuous to venture a prediction of 2049. Choosing an earlier date, ten years from now, is certainly more realistic. It is both near and far: near, because we can assume that some of the context and dynamics of 2035 are already at work today; far, because predictions about AI or the environment, and even more so about radical politics, suggest that more fundamental changes lie ahead.

We have identified twenty-eight distinct mutations – or, more precisely, twenty-eight trajectories – that together outline as many possible scenarios for the future. Naturally, no single mutation occurs in isolation; all developments are interdependent, and every form of evolution is both multifaceted and influenced by multiple factors. While our analysis presents these trajectories separately for the sake of clarity, it is essential to remember that the various art worlds are evolving in their own temporalities – either capitalizing on the opportunities of accelerated modernity or contending with its disruptive forces. Whether these transformations will ultimately prove beneficial or detrimental to artists remains uncertain. Let us reconvene in 2035 to assess their impact.

# I - THE DIGITAL TRANSITION

The digital shift that has taken place in the art world since the very beginning of the 2000s has profoundly transformed art, artists and the cultural and creative industries (NEA, 2022; DEPS, 2020; Escaith, 2022; Weckerle, 2024). The golden age of computing was before, and even the personal computer was earlier, but what's happening at the turn of the century is far more important: it's the birth of the "global village" through the connection of all computers to each other, thanks to the Internet.

Entire swathes of culture have shifted, giving rise here to new art forms and there, thanks to the cloud, streaming, blockchain, NFT or metavers, to new unidentified artistic objects (Peters, 2016; Ruparelia, 2016; Sautoy, 2019; Davies, 2019; Kholeif, 2023; Whitaker, 2023; Greffe, 2024). The role of social networks in cultural creation and consumption is also particularly important (Donnat, 2009; Auletta, 2009; Davies, 2016a, 2016b, 2017; DEPS, 2020).

If this revolution is fundamental and profoundly new, it was preceded by numerous movements (such as Cyberpunk) and was thought of, even before it materialized, by thinkers such as George Orwell (1984), Stanley Kubrick (2001 Space Odyssey) and Gilles Deleuze. Deleuze's book *A Thousand Plateaus*, a subtle metaphor for the digital world, and his innovative concepts ("multiplicity", "rhizome", "image-movement", "desiring machines", "territorialization", "deterritorialization", "reterritorialization", "agency", "nomadism" etc.) have a strong influence on the worlds of art and digital art today.

Yet the contemporary developments of our world surpass anything that these authors, or those of science fiction or cyberpunk, could have imagined. For the relationship between creation and technology is such, and so intertwined, that we now speak of "Tech-art" or "Creative Tech" (Weckerle, 2024b). To sum up the main effects of this mutation, we can say that digital technology affects culture in several ways once. To facilitate understanding, the argument can be reduced to five main points here:

– First and foremost, digital technology brings about a general disintermediation, putting an end to numerous intermediaries (distributors, retailers, cultural critics,

art director, media, etc.). This disintermediation is only apparent however, as it is reflected in the emergence of new intermediaries and influencers (platforms, apps, content creators, influencers, curators, etc.).

– Digital technology is also changing the focus from supply to demand (i.e. from artist to consumer): yesterday, the creative sector was primarily supply-based; today, it is demand-based (Menger, 1983; Martel, 2010). This also translates into a shift from "push" to "pull" mode: yesterday, the producer organized content distribution according to a "push" model (on his own); today, on platforms such as Netflix, Spotify, YouTube, Twitch or Only Fans the customer is "king" and organizes his or her own consumption according to a "pull" model (NEA, 2022; DEPS, 2020). However, this freedom, too quickly given, has been largely taken over by what we'll call "features" in this article, notably by algorithms or processes, that once again deprive the consumer of his or her freedom.

– At the same time, digital technology increases diversity, the mixing of genres and hybridization, while overturning the classic cultural hierarchy, which is now completely "upside-down" (Martel, 2010; Coulangeon, 2021). But this liberation from gatekeepers is in turn hampered by (once again) the emergence of "features", algorithms, platforms and social networks.

– The work of art was largely a cultural "product" (and "cultural goods"): it is now increasingly a "service" (a stream, a video stream, an app, a format etc., rather than a CD, DVD etc.). The nature of the value generated in this respect has shifted from "product" to "service".

– While individual creativity remains a determining factor, it is becoming less and less the norm, given the global networks in which it is embedded, the machines on which it is increasingly dependent and, last but not least, the nature of many artistic "collectives" (McCormark, 2016; Blistene, 2023).

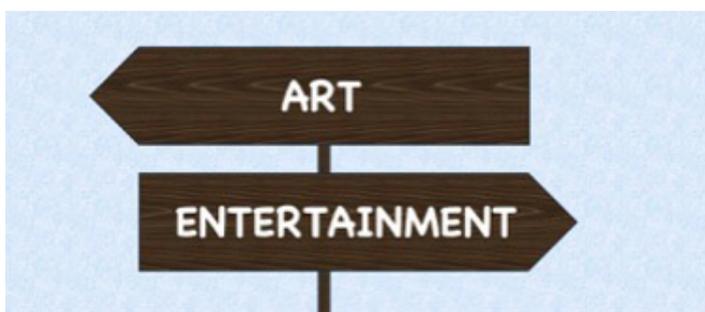
## 1. THE ARTIST AS DISTRACTION

Cultural debate in the last century was long structured by the opposition between art and entertainment, or to put it in more "judgmental" terms, between "highbrow culture" and "lowbrow culture". Between the two, the American critic Dwight McDonald spoke of "middlebrow culture" in a famous essay (Benjamin, 1935; Adorno, 1944; McDonald, 1960; Martel, 2010). Many cultural critics and intellectuals, particularly heirs to the Frankfurt School, have long considered it their job to

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distinguish between these two cultures and protect their boundaries (Durand-Gasselin, 2012).

This explains why the highly Europeanized American cultural elite – the *Partisan Review*, the philanthropists who funded the great orchestras and museums and, of course, Theodor Adorno – long refused to recognize popular culture as art and, in Adorno's case, his refusal to take seriously the originality of blues and jazz, or at least its belonging to the art world (Adorno, 1944, 1947; Gioia, 1997; Durand-Gasselin, 2012). The same was true of rock and pop, comics, anime, mangas and so on (Martel, 2010). This is well summed up by the diagram below, which I borrow from jazz critic Ted Gioia, who himself drew inspiration from Anna Lembrke's book on "dopamine" (Lembrke, 2021; Gioia, 2024).



For a long time, this schema dominated European-centric minds in America: art and entertainment represented two antagonistic worlds, ontologically separated. And from this distinction stemmed the need to protect art from entertainment, which for a long time was the *raison d'être* of cultural policies, in Europe but in the United States as well (Martel, 2010).

Protecting the boundary between art and entertainment, given the market's vicious tendency to pervert art and recuperate it, was the guiding principle behind the ideas of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, major figures of the Frankfurt School. They denounced all forms of art "standardization" (Adorno, 1944, 1947; Durand-Gasselin, 2012). In so doing, we said it, Adorno and his successors dismissed (as vulgar and philistine) jazz, cinema, television, rock, romance, comics, manga, soap operas and TV series, digital art and so on (Daney, 1994, 1999). Which is a debate from the last century; nothing works that way in our century any more.



The major break in this debate and the end of this fundamental distinction can be dated from 1965-1978 (between president Lyndon Johnson's major immigration laws and the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965, and the Supreme Court decision establishing cultural diversity as the matrix of American society in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, June 28, 1978). From this period onwards, and mainly due to the change in the way the Black question was viewed, the cultural hierarchy changed, upside-down (Schuck, 2003; Pratt, 2005; Martel 2006; Vlassus, 2015).

A number of critics and artists had anticipated or accompanied this movement, calling this boundary into question, either by including popular works in "Art" (work carried out as early as the 1950s by La Nouvelle Vague, *Les Cahiers du cinéma*, Jean-Luc Godard and subsequently *The New Yorker* or Serge Daney etc.), or by showing the social dimension of this hierarchy, as did Pierre Bourdieu and his followers. Furthermore, the boundary has evolved over time, gradually absorbing into the art world various cultural forms that were the subject of early critique by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer.

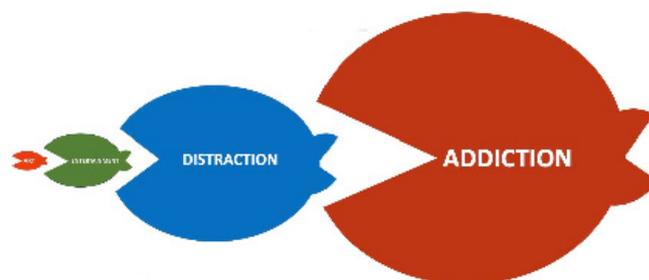
Since the 1980s, this "distinction" has faded away, and the cultural hierarchy, now suspect, has collapsed to the point where few people today, in the United States at least, still distinguish the arts between "high" and "low" culture (Martel, 2010). A tradition that might be described as "Adornian" is still alive and well in Germany, in France and even in UK and the US, but it no longer corresponds to the cultural tastes of young people and a large part of the American or European population. And this is without even considering the rest of the world – from Japan to Brazil, South Africa to China.

This shift is all the more significant as the debate has taken on a new dimension: domains once clearly identified as "art" and "entertainment" are increasingly being sidelined by a new cultural force—distraction—which, for lack of a better term, may be described as "infinite scrolling" (or, in a more critical vein, "doomscrolling").

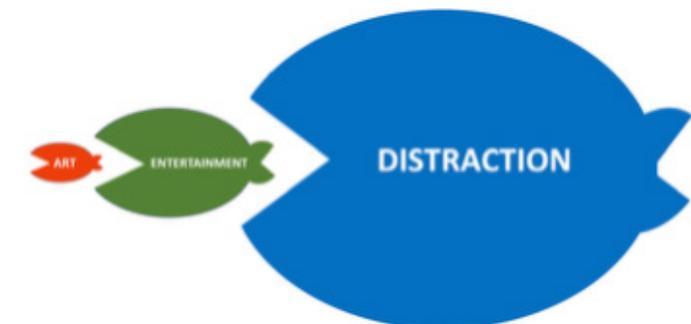
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What's it all about? We've all experienced it: it's those fifteen-second or so videos on Tik Tok or Snapchat, those Instagram "reels" and "stories", those notifications and that new world of "clickbait" and "swipe". Whether we attribute it to "addiction" or "dopamine", let's remember that the use of social networks by young people (but also adults) is very clearly linked to tools and "features" put in place by platforms to keep users for as long as possible, since their advertising model depends on it (Carr, 2010; Cardon, 2015, 2019; Christian, 2016; Wu, 2017; Chayka, 2024; Solomon, 2024; Hayes, 2025). To summarize the current "battle", see the diagram below (Gioia, 2024):

consequences of social networks and platforms for young people (Lembke, 2021; Haidt, 2024; Solomon, 2024). The new debate is not around the definition of culture, it is related to distraction and addiction.



However, if we try not to be caricatural, we need to put this new distinction into perspective. After all, Netflix, Spotify, Deezer, Apple Music and YouTube offer access to "art", "entertainment" and "distraction" in equal measure. Here too – and once again – the boundaries are shifting, and it's difficult to caricaturally oppose "culture" and "entertainment", without replaying the battle of the 1950s-1970s that saw the defeat of Adorno and the victory of *The New Yorker* (or, to put it in another way, the defeat of the elite and the victory of popular culture). We can even assume that by 2035, these three fields will be so intertwined that it will be difficult to distinguish between them as we do today around this old debate of "art" versus "entertainment".



If one wants to go into more detail, here is the in-depth table I propose based on this analysis:

CULTURE		DISTRACTION
Art	entertainment	Infinite scrolling
Cinema	Television	Tik Tok, Instagram, Snapchat
Dance, ballet	Sport	Stories, reels...
Theater	Broadway musical	Emoji
Classical music, opera (jazz)	Rock, Pop, Rap	Swipe on apps, notifications...
Books	Comics, manga	Filter bubbles
Read a newspaper	TV series	Clickbait
Cultural critics		Influencers, features

Today, art and entertainment are no longer opposites, nor enemies: they are together in the face of the new "barbarians" of "infinite scrolling", "features" and "distraction" – in other words, platforms and social networks. Added to this is the increasingly alarming criticism by scientists and neurologists of the social

## 2. THE ARTIST AS A STARTUP ENTREPRENEUR.

As a consequence of this great digital mutation, artists have emancipated themselves from the old models (the theatrical troupe, the rock band, the company) to set up on their own.

The shift towards the start-up model is a significant development in the art world. While it is difficult to date this evolution precisely, it can be linked to the digital transition, and it seems that the "start-up" model has become the legal norm for artists. Even in the creative industries, where movie studios, music labels and imprints used to dominate, they no longer seem to be the only one in charge (Caves, 2000; Starr, 2004; Throsby, 2004). Instead, a "constellation of players" is involved, linked together by juicy contracts signed before specialized lawyers and talent agencies. The reason? Because culture almost always renews itself from the periphery and the margins (Starr, 2004; Throsby,

2004; Martel, 2010). This paradigm, though originally associated with the creative and cultural sectors, has come to shape the experiences of artists more broadly – including, and arguably most acutely, those outside institutional or commercial frameworks.

Several studies have shown that artists are increasingly "self-employed" and "freelance" (Menger, 2003, 2014; Woronkiewicz, 2019; ZCCE, FSO) – which doesn't prevent them from being poor (Abbing, 2002). The "gig", traditional in jazz since the 1930s, has become the norm in the artistic profession, to the point where "culture" is now referred to as the "gig economy" (Woodcock, 2019; Markusen, 2020; Nicolay, 2024; ZCCE, FSO). Based on a study of the US population between 2003 and 2015, we can show that whole swathes of employees in the cultural professions (who had full-time, perennial contracts) have switched to the world of self-employment or freelance work. This development is more pronounced, more rapid and more frequent than in other professional sectors, although it is a fundamental trend in contemporary economies (Woronkiewicz, 2019).

At the same time, the "project" mode is also widespread among artists who, being neither salaried nor tied to a single organization, engage with multiple employers and undertake numerous projects (Jones, 2015, see [DeFillippi]).

It's the start-up model that is becoming the matrix of the art world, but a start-up that is most often a one-person operation. This substantive shift contributes to the impoverishment of an entire profession (I will come back to this point).

### 3. THE ARTIST AS A MACHINE (AI)

#### *The situation*

Artists have always been at the cutting edge of technology, with Andy Warhol, for example, using modern consumer techniques before their widespread use in advertising (Bois, 2004; Gopnik, 2020). Digital art is no exception, and artists have been pioneers in digital art: from conception to production to distribution, digital has been omnipresent in art for several decades. So has the practice of social networking (Jones, 2015 [see Cattani]). And even when an artist like Salman Toor returns to classical oil painting, he incorporates smart-phones and other "devices" into his work (Toor, 2020, 2022).

A quantitative study we conducted at ZCCE/ZHdK on Hong Kong cartoonists (Wong, 2025) gave us an

accurate picture of this movement. Drawing on the analysis of the work of 115 Hong Kong cartoonists, of whom we catalogued and coded almost 7,000 images and artworks, evidence indicates that these artists expressed themselves on social networks, not only on Facebook or Instagram – the classic networks – but also on Telegram or very specific online forums, such as LIHKG (Wong, 2025). All of which correlate with fast-growing artist's digital practices (PWHC, 2021; WSJ, 2025; Accenture, 2025).

Last but not least, cultural venues are also gradually moving into the digital age, especially orchestras and museums, whether in terms of their collections (which are increasingly accessible online), devices for physical visits, communications or, in the case of live performances, the online distribution of their own productions (see for example the past projects of Michael Tilson Thomas's San Francisco Symphony Orchestra or the Miami Symphony Orchestra). In 2024, the Museum of Art + Light (MoA+L), a new contemporary art museum "dedicated to connecting technology and art in the digital age with traditional visual and performing arts" opened in Kansas. Another institution opened in Zurich (the Museum of Digital Art) and in Montreux (the Montreux Jazz Digital Project). Additionally, dedicated exhibitions, such as "Machine Love" in the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo), have also marked the 2020s.

However, digital acceleration poses many challenges for artists, and could fundamentally transform their relationship with art, not least because of artificial intelligence.

The digital transition since the 1960s can be summed up in five stages:

1) The birth of the computer (1960-1980), with IBM at the heart of the process: this paved the way for the computerization of society. "Machine learning" was already in gestation (Alpaydin, 2020).

2) *The personal computer* (1980-2000), with Microsoft and Intel at the heart of the digital transition. Corporate robotization is a consequence (WSG, 2024).

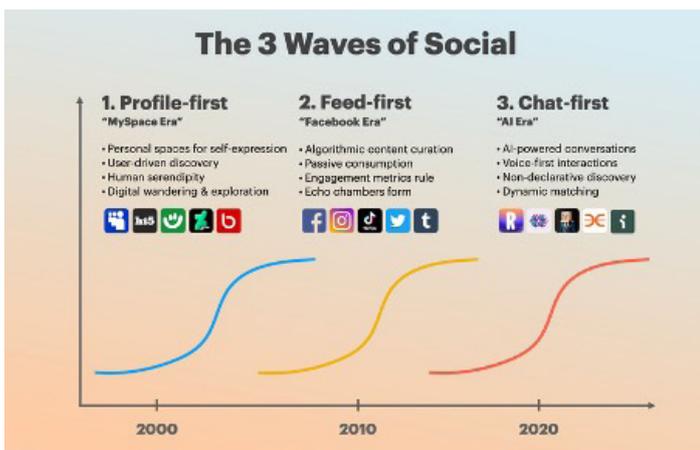
3) *The Internet revolution* (from 2000), with Google and Apple at the heart of the process: it is the networked computer. This gave rise to a major transformation of industrial, administrative and unskilled jobs. "Deep learning" and "machine learning" develop at that time (Castells, 1998; Cohen, 2015, 2022; Kai-Fu, 2019).

4) *The age of social networks*, itself divided into several waves:

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- The first "profile-first" wave, when everyone created their own personal space for self-expression (My Space, blogs, micro-blogs, Facebook and Twitter before algorithms; LinkedIn page before the "feed"). (Amsellem, 2025).

- The second "feed first" wave (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, the beginnings of Instagram...). Age of "likes", "retweets" and "shares"...



Source: Hugo AMSELLEM, "The Social Renaissance" (Substack, February 13, 2025).

- The so-called "algorithmic" third wave, where curation becomes algorithmically managed and content is entirely algorithmic (notably Instagram, Tik Tok, Snapchat...). Metrics are increasingly important, and feed usage is increasingly passive. Short videos, stories and reels are becoming central (Amsellem, 2025).

5) *The age of artificial intelligence and Generative AI* (since 2015) with Open AI, launched in 2015 and Nvidia. LLMs has become widespread from 2021 onwards, enabling, for example, "text-to-image" in 2021 and then artificial intelligence in multimodal mode (voice, image, video and text). This is a revolution for skilled and creative professions (Le Cun, 2019; Kai-Fu, 2019; Kai-Fu, 2021; Duhigg, 2023; Witt, 2023; Marantz, 2024; WSG, 2024)

### Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence has been one of the key debates of the 2020s. And any predictions in this area remain difficult to make. Some see it as an indispensable tool for future artistic life; others believe that generative AI will lead to the disappearance of the artist – a kind of "end of art" or "anartism", to use Marcel Duchamp's word (Rousseau, 2024). However, some artists have already risen to prominence through artificial intelligence, as

demonstrated by the landmark 2025 exhibition at the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo, *Machine Love: Video Games, AI and Contemporary Art*. Among them were: Bleep, Kate Crawford, Vladan Joler, Diemut Strebe, Asako Fujikura, Hsu Chia-Wei, Kim Ayoung, Lu Yang, Ryotaro Sato, Jacolby Satterwhite, Jakob Kudsk Steensen, Adrián Villar Rojas, and Anicka Yi, to name just a few (Mori Art Museum, 2025).

Does AI would "kill the little God that the artist has become", as Duchamp once predicted? Canadian art critic Stephan Wright believes that we are heading "towards an art without work, without author and without spectator" (Wright, 2007). For their part, and contrary to those previously mentioned, some museums are already aggressively experimenting with AI in their exhibitions (Musée des arts décoratifs de Paris, since 2025; Louvre Abu Dhabi, since 2024; Mori Art Museum in Tokyo, in 2025). We asked dozens of students at École des Beaux Arts of Paris and a number of them were intrigued by this hypothesis of « the end of art » (and, of course, concerned about their own future).

There is more: in the field of social networking, AI could give rise to a fourth wave of "personalized" (or "social AI") conversations, individualized, customized and real-time (with, as a result, a structural weakening of "feed"). Voice will become more important (Voice-first), proving infinitely richer than text. Gaming is already announcing these evolutions, for example Inworld AI, Ego AI or AI Dungeon (Amsellem, 2025).

Most economists and specialists predict a major transformation of the highly-skilled professions of the "creative classes" as a result of the widespread use of AI and, more broadly, neural networks, deep learning and machine learning, large language models and quantum computing. By 2027, generative AI will have profoundly transformed digital technology (PWHC, 2021; Cohen, 2022; WSJ, 2025; Accenture, 2025).

The jobs threatened by this new-generation automation are innumerable: the world of education, the legal professions (lawyers...), banking, insurance etc. will be particularly affected, if only because the tasks that will be entrusted to AI will be carried out at virtually zero cost. Translation will be revolutionized, with real-time and live conversation translation tools (KUDO; Interprefy; Zoom with Simultaneous Interpretation; Speechmatics; Lingmo Translation; TransPerfect; VoxSigma by Vocapia; AI Interpretations etc.).

Some researchers estimate that 40% of today's skilled jobs will be affected or disappear as a result of

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AI (Kai Fu, 2021; Cohen, 2022), and these transformations are already affecting such sectors as defense (AI is becoming central to warfare), security (facial recognition coupled with police files), city management (smart cities) etc. (Towsend, 2013; Halgoua, 2020).

In this context, should all artists be encouraged to train in code, as some are proposing, in order to become developers (and art schools to offer them such courses as AI literacy or Digital Literacy)? Yes and no. There are many good examples of curriculum which mix arts and coding (Medialab at MIT, MIT List Visual Arts Center, Medialab at Sciences-Po Paris, etc.). However, it seems preferable to us that the option remains voluntary, should future artists feel the need – for instance, through a "Minor" program.

The fact remains, however, that machines and AI are invading more and more fields of art every day. To take just one example that comes close to that of culture: peer-reviewed scientific journals such as *Nature*, *Science*, *The Lancet* and others, are already being affected by this revolution. Thanks to machine learning, these journals are planning to entrust AI with editing, translating and summarizing articles, as well as fight plagiarism. They are even planning to go one step further by entrusting the machine with the peer review and validation of scientific texts, which is at the heart of their model.

We can therefore assume that the art world itself will not escape these major evolutions. It is important to anticipate these consequences in the lives of artists, especially as some assert provocatively, "artificial intelligence is an artist" (Le Cun, 2019)

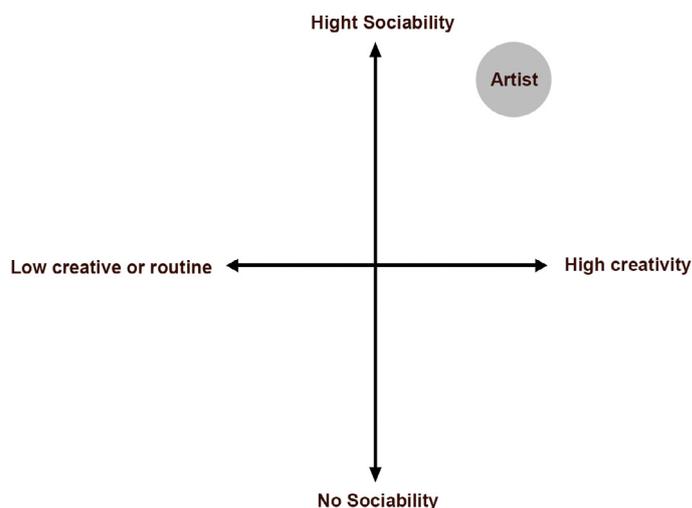
However, I'd like to take an orthogonal position in relation to a number of analyses that have become very mainstream today: will creativity be affected as much by AI as they say? On the contrary, we might think that the art world will be one of the sectors preserved by the generalization of AI. Indeed, AI cannot create or innovate: it is incapable of making its own choices; it cannot think creatively (Kai-Fu, 2021, p. 394). While it can reproduce a work to perfection and easily imagine a new work from those already existing, it can hardly create anything new. We can even assume that it will be difficult for AI to imagine a new Marcel Duchamp piece of art, a new Andy Warhol or a new Joseph Beuys. In the words of philosopher and art historian Anne Cauquelin, AI is scarcely capable of generating « embrayeurs » (« triggers ») – as she terms, borrowing from linguistic theory – figures akin to Duchamp or Warhol (Cauquelin, 1992).

With no empathy, no compassion and no

perception of standards of either beauty or goodness – which are at the heart of the creative professions – AI can hardly replace the writer, the analytical journalist (the same cannot be said of agency or news journalism) or the artist. And even if AI does make progress in these areas in the coming years – enabling machines to see and hear, for example, as is already the case – it is unlikely that it will be able to reach human levels of empathy, judgment, criticism, sociability or creativity (Kai-Fu, 2021, pp. 394-395). To put it another way, an AI can already write a student's paper, it can correct it and it may even evaluate it – but it cannot replace the teacher's empathy in his or her singular dialogue with the student. (For example, we have seen, after a period of immense enthusiasm for MOOCs, their rapid decline since Covid.)

As summarized by Lee Kai-Fu: the more routine and unsociable a task, the more efficient AI will be, and, as a consequence, the more jobs will be destroyed; but the more creative (original) and "highly sociable" the task, the less efficient it will be (Kai-Fu, 2021, p. 395). The capacities for invention, innovation and originality required by artists would ultimately be among the least threatened by AI.

The following diagram summarizes these developments:



(This graphic is adapted from a model by Lee Kai-Fu, whom I follow here in part; but I don't re-use his idea on the artist. On the contrary, I think the artist is, by nature, an ultra-social being, even when isolated in his workshop: see Kai-Fu, 2021, p. 395).

To read the graph above, we can say that the cognitive (skilled) jobs that will be most affected by AI

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are in the bottom-left corner, and those that will be least affected, in the top-right.

The machine's capacity for abstraction is also weak, whereas it is strong in humans: yet this abstraction is a necessary dimension of art and the artist's craft. Inference, especially deductive inference (and sometimes even inductive inference), also seems difficult for the machine, leaving designers some room for manoeuvre.

While machines are capable of performing countless tasks better than humans, they fall far short when it comes to prediction and foresight, not to mention imagination and disruption – the hallmarks of the human world, and of artists in particular. What the machine will be able to do, and what it will leave to humans: this is the debate of the decade to come.

At this stage, AI also remains trapped in singular tasks. Although some AIs are "generalists", most AIs are very specific; that is, they can only perform a single task, in a single context. For example, a spell-checker can't do math, and the world's best chess program can't play Tetris. Human intelligence, on the other hand, is different. We can solve a variety of tasks, including those we've never encountered before. That's what artists do, and it gives them a big head over AI (Togelius, 2024).

Another dimension is added to those mentioned above: the ability to evolve in unfamiliar environments. Here again, the writer, the artist and, more broadly, the artistic professions, require this kind of fluidity that the machine does not have.

For all these reasons, it seems to me that the creative fields, and art in particular, are unlikely to be replaced by machines and automation. AI will have a hard time imposing itself on the artist's craft.

### ***The transformative effects of AI for artists***

That being said: we must not overlook the effects that AI could have on art by 2035. We know that digital technology is already omnipresent at all levels of the creative process (the architect's design, the musician's score, the recording of a piece of music, the editing of a film, the writing and editing of a book, its translation and promotion, etc.). All these interactions between the artist and the machine are set to increase dramatically (NESTA, 2020).

Creators are among the best informed about the capabilities of AI (92% of them know what it is) and already 62% of "content creators" on the Internet are

using generative AI tools (WSJ, 2024; Accenture, 2025). Artists and creators are also, along with journalists and communications professionals, the socio-professional category that predicts that generative AI will become far more important in their activity than other professions: 26% of their activity already depends on AI, and this is set to rise to 38% (WSJ, 2024, p. 42). And some studies – particularly disturbing – suggest that animation and cartoons could soon be 90% cheaper thanks to AI (Barnes, 2025).

The following table shows the different cultural sectors and how they are already, or could be, affected by generative AI:

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Media, Cultural sector	Work by Generative AI	Software & Generative AI tools
Film and video	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Content creation</li> <li>- Text to Video, Text to image tools</li> <li>- Language options: Automatically produce movie subtitles in all available languages</li> <li>- Removal of filter words from video</li> <li>- Aiding visual effects in a Video production</li> <li>- Added transition or special effects videos</li> <li>- Changing background images</li> <li>- Script Writing and Initial Video Creation</li> <li>- Creation of Movie Trailers</li> <li>- Bringing dead personalities back to life with new content</li> <li>- Customized porn (with the person of your choice, including from photos given to the machine...)</li> <li>- Dubbing video in different languages</li> <li>- Curation: find recommendation for films and videos</li> <li>- Summarize feedbacks from movie reviews</li> </ul>	<p>Filmora  Synthesia  Gen-2  Dübverse  Wombo  Opus  Vizcom  Vizard.ai  Pictory  Deepbrain AI  Lumens 5  Descript  FlexClip  Filmora</p>
Music, podcast and sound	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Text to Music</li> <li>- List of song ideas</li> <li>- Voice cloning, adding background vocalists</li> <li>- Altering Style to Match a different genre</li> <li>- Album cover art</li> <li>- Creation of "original" music titles</li> <li>- Creating background audio for a song or a film</li> <li>- Voice cloning</li> <li>- Text to Audio tools</li> <li>- Automatic creation of images and videos from music</li> <li>- Virtual concerts with unlimited seating</li> <li>- Podcast script writing</li> <li>- Automated reading of articles or books (and Automated transcripts of podcast episodes)</li> <li>- Automatic transcription and translation of audio interviews</li> <li>- Customized music and playlist recommendations</li> <li>- More audiobooks in all available languages</li> <li>- Read articles in all available languages</li> <li>- Correction of an audio sound (removing background ambience, for example, changing an instrument, removing or adding a voice, etc.).</li> <li>- Curation: find recommendation for music</li> <li>- DAB+, which will become the radio standard, increasing the amount of metadata and the number of radios.</li> </ul>	<p>Jarvis AI  Moises's App  Landr's  Google Music LM  Murf.AI  Listnr  Sibelius  Lovo  Soundful  Aiva  Muber  Boomy  Beatoven.AI</p>

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Gaming, Animation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Concept art for in-game environments and characters</li> <li>- Content creation</li> <li>- Story Development</li> <li>- Chat moderation</li> <li>- Copilot for coding</li> <li>- Automated bug detection</li> <li>- Avatar and object creation/customization</li> <li>- Game trailer creation</li> </ul>	Synthesia Gen-2 Vizco Dübverse Wombo Opus Leonardo.AI Rosebud.AI GitHub Copilot
Writing, literature, journalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inspiration : Generating a list of ideas and prompts for content</li> <li>- Content creation: Creation of "original" fiction or non-fiction (first draft, initial article writing)</li> <li>- Text to text tools</li> <li>- Altering text tone/style</li> <li>- Writing assistant: writing improvement, proofreading, improve grammar and style, change of style</li> <li>- Outline/summary of text</li> <li>- Translation of a book into an unlimited number of languages</li> <li>- Curation: find recommendation for books to read</li> <li>- Voices optimized to read different genres of audiobooks</li> <li>- Headlines optimized for Internet traffic or SEO</li> <li>- Create data visualization to enhance an article</li> <li>- Fraud and copyright infringement detection</li> </ul>	Deepl Nveda MT-NLG Chat-GPT4 CrAlyon Playground Midjourney KREA Grammarly Laika Rytr Lokalise
Visual arts, Cartoons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Content creation and Text-to-image detailed sketches/images</li> <li>- Creating detailed digital sketches</li> <li>- Creating photos, posters, album covers (using the album's music, for example)</li> <li>- Generating images as a starting point for artistic creations</li> <li>- Curation: find recommendation for artists</li> <li>- Background fill</li> </ul>	Adobe Firefly Dall.E.3 Playground Midjourney Tome Make-a-scene
Art teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Customized class and learning materials</li> <li>- Personal tutors</li> <li>- Generating outlines, syllabuses etc.</li> <li>- Learning with the machine</li> <li>- Automated scoring</li> <li>- Content explanation</li> <li>- Fraud and copyright infringement detection</li> </ul>	Jasper Chat-GPT4 Bing Chat Kajabi Tome Make-a-scene
Design, architecture and advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 3D presentation of all projects, with customer modulation (currently being rolled out)</li> <li>- AI creation of projects based on models developed by the architectural firm, or by others.</li> <li>- AI-generated prototypes, mock-ups and sketches.</li> <li>- Improve a design</li> </ul>	Vizard.ai WPP Jasper

(Sources: Kai-fu, 2019, 2020; Le Cun, 2019; WSJ, 2024; WSJ, 2025; Togelius, 2024; Accenture, 2025)

The pertinent question that emerges is the extent of autonomy – or "agency" – that artists will retain within a society increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence. This agency will be contingent upon the opportunities and challenges that AI presents to artistic practice. It can be posited that these effects will depend less on the specific artistic discipline and more on the individual artist's level of originality, distinctiveness, and capacity for innovation.

Here are the main evolution and risks we can already identify:

- The problem of copyright (see § "The artist as plagiarist").

- The problem of originality. For several years now, systems have been trained to create original paintings from scratch, to the point of fooling experts (e.g. the experiments carried out at Rutgers University in the US). Similarly, in music, AI can create "original" musical compositions from existing sounds: countless examples can be found on SoundCloud and, already, on Spotify or Deezer. Similarly, an AI designed by Huawei has made it possible to present Schubert's Symphony No. 8, known as "Unfinished"... completed in London in 2019 (Le Cun, 2019). As for the visual arts, the "The Next Rembrandt" project developed by Microsoft is already making it possible to create new "Rembrandts" using an AI that has analyzed all the painter's works to deduce his trade secrets and be able to create new paintings. In the age of the quantum computer, will the machine be able to create new collections of works by Picasso or Gauguin? (Bousteau, 2023).

- Artist-craftsmen who reproduce existing works or ideas, without any major transformation or originality, will be particularly affected and therefore at risk. AI is highly capable of producing works "in the manner of...", and already does so masterfully. "It transforms any photo into a Monet painting, changes a winter landscape into a spring scene or replaces a horse in a video with a zebra" (Le Cun, 2019, p. 15). The artist "as a copyist" will be the most vulnerable.

- Certain specific professional categories within each artistic discipline could also be affected, although it is not yet possible to measure the number of artists concerned. Let's take the example of a musician who plays a score: there's no doubt that the future Martha Argerich won't be replaceable by AI, but what about those restaurant pianists who repeat the same score night after night? What about those watercolor painters who tirelessly repeat the same strokes from the same

images? Here again, we can assume that AI will affect artists differently: the most original and creative will be protected, while the most routine artists will be threatened.

Joseph Beuys' prediction that "Every human being is an artist" (Antliff, 2014; Borer, 1970; Mesch, 2017) could prove particularly false in the age of AI, since only the most unusual, the most demanding and original, or the most professional, will survive *as artist*.

However, this hypothesis remains rather counter-intuitive compared to other prognoses which tend to predict – this time in line with Beuys – that new software (generative AI, metaverse...) will enable everyone to become an artist (WSJ, 2025). Other authors imagine that everyone will be able to develop their creativity and even achieve success (Cameron, 1992).

Ultimately, we can assume that the art world will experience a genuine AI revolution by 2035, but that this will prove positive for the most original artists, enabling them to make a qualitative leap forward in originality. In this hypothesis, generative AI should encourage artists to innovate. Some researchers have stressed that innovation and creativity are at the heart of the digital process, bringing the digital world closer to that of culture in the broadest sense (Levy, 1984; Brand, 1987; Himanen, 2001; Turner, 2006; Markoff, 2006; Martel, 2014; Fisher, 2018; Harris, 2023).

Let's add one last point here. If modern art is characterized as much by the "artistic process" – Marcel Duchamp's famous "Processus créatif" or "the creative art" (Bois, 2004, 2017; Rousseau, 2024) – as by the finished "product", AI, because it participates in this process, could retain an important place in this debate. As a (temporary) conclusion to the discussion, it appears prudent to predict that artists exhibiting greater creativity and originality will be comparatively less affected by AI. Consequently, artificial intelligence is likely to foster a qualitative leap in creative expression – arguably one of its most significant and ultimately positive outcomes.

#### **4. THE ARTIST AS PLAGIARIST: ART AND COPYRIGHT.**

Historically, the legal recognition of "droit d'auteur" and the establishment of legal protection for creation, thanks to Beaumarchais' initiative, ratified as early as January 13, 1791 by the Constituent Assembly during the French Revolution, freed artists from the tutelage of churches and philanthropic protectors. "Copyright",

the continuation of "droit d'auteur" in the Anglo-Saxon world, further strengthened this legal protection, albeit in a different way (Jones, 2015 [see MacMillan]). In any case, the question of *droit d'auteur* or *copyright* has gradually become a central aspect of public and cultural policy (Durrer, 2019).

If a certain consensus prevailed in the protection of copyright in the western world for more than two centuries, this was shattered at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21th century under the blows of three movements:

- The "Eastern" countries, especially the USSR and China, challenged these "colonialist" copyright protections, and have generally applied them little or not at all since the 1960s. This was also the case in Cuba and many African countries. This direct or implicit rejection of copyright remains true in many countries today, starting with China when it comes to "Western" cultural products (Jones, 2015 [see MacMillan]).

- The advent of digital technology has given rise to wide-ranging debates on copyright, particularly in relation to the exchange of digital music files via *peer-to-peer* in the 2000s or sampling since then (Lessig, 2001, 2004, 2008; Palfrey, 2011; DOC, 2013; American Assembly, 2022; MPAA, 2020-2025). However, the spread of subscription-based streaming services, such as Spotify, Deezer or Apple Music, has tended to calm these debates, particularly in Western countries (Jones, 2015 [see Kretschmer]).

- Artificial intelligence is re-opening the debate and changing the game once again, making it possible to quickly and easily create cultural "works" from pre-existing content, which is difficult to identify *a posteriori* due to the billions of data on which AIs have been trained (Jones, 2015 [see MacMillan]).

The ability to generate original works of art today thanks to generative AI and, more broadly, neural networks and Large Language Models, is already a highly advanced reality. We can create music, books, photos and even films from pre-existing content. In the field of music, for example, software and apps such as Jarvis AI, Moises's App or Landr's, dubbed "AI-Generated Songs" apps, enable "original" content to be created from learned melodies; they also allow voices or instruments to be separated or added freely.

These spectacular technical developments already raise the problem of the source used to train these AIs. When Jarvis AI is asked, for example, to "create a two-minute piece of music with voices that

sound like Frank Sinatra", the AI will necessarily draw on Sinatra's repertoire to come up with a new "original" sound. Rights-holders are then legitimately entitled to hold such an application to account, and today we refer to as "Rogue AI". There are countless new tools to do this kind of work, such as Rytr, Writesonic, Junia, Native Instruments, Waves, Synchro Arts, Landr... (WSJ, 2025). This movement is not necessarily negative. Many artists "offer" their works online by publishing them under "creative commons" licenses. We also know from our study in Hong Kong on cartoonists that artists have often favored "open source" distribution models, admittedly in the context of protests against the Chinese government (Wong, 2025). However, artists' willingness to relinquish part of their copyright is only acceptable if it reflects their own choice, rather than constituting an organized exploitation to fuel artificial intelligence systems. Finally, and in contrast to the above concerns, there is also the question of the legal protection of new works created by generative AI. There is currently a lively debate on this subject, but it is impossible to predict how case law will evolve.

## 5. THE ARTIST AS GEEK, HIPSTER AND CYBERPUNK

The relationship between art and the digital, between artists and "hackers", has been well studied, and we know the decisive influence that counterculture had on the birth and development of Silicon Valley (Levy, 1984; Brand, 1987; Himanen, 2001; Turner, 2006; Markoff, 2006; Martel, 2014; Fisher, 2018; Harris, 2023).

This dialogue, which enabled artists to participate in the birth and development of the Internet, has been marked, since the 2000s, by a great reciprocity: the Internet and developers have also contributed to nourishing art in singular and decisive ways. Geeks, hipsters, the cyberpunk movement and coders alike have a decisive influence on art today. This trend is unlikely to dry up in the years to come, as it is so rich in perspectives and creativity (Mori Art Museum, 2025).

We also need to take full account of the decisive influence of "cyberpunk", a movement born as a sub-genre of science fiction, and which is itself a "mixture of genres", influenced by authors as diverse as Isaac Asimov, William Burroughs, Philip K. Dick, Dashiell Hammett, Thomas Pynchon and the psychedelic writer Timothy Leary. Cyberpunk ideology has had a decisive influence on video games since the 1980s,

as well as on literature and cinema, as demonstrated by the blockbusters *Blade Runner and Matrix* (Lucas, 2020). The phenomenon was initially American, but has since spread to other geographies (Lucas, 2020). A magazine like *Décodeur*, published in Milan from 1986, or the "techno-anarchist" collectives of Berlin in the 1980s, also seem to have opened up dialogues between computer developers and artists. Since the 1980s, Japan has also seen a rich blending of genres between art and machines in cyberspace (Mori Art Museum, 2025). This trend is likely to grow in the years to come, although it is difficult to predict the paths that artistic creation will take in this field. The "Cyberpunk" movement is constantly evolving, and like the eruptions of an awakening volcano, it's difficult to determine the paths its fiery flows will take.

Be that as it may, it's worth asking what new forms of counterculture will emerge by 2035. Today, some critics claim (or at least have the impression) that everything has already been done in terms of counterculture and that we've reached a dead end, for example in the field of contemporary art. Yet the history of the avant-garde confirms that new voices and new forms are always possible.

### 6. THE ARTIST AS GAMER

The art world also has strong links with video games, and this incestuous and conflicting relationship, which some may have considered suicidal, is set to intensify. For a long time, however, video games were not considered artistic. Like comics, manga or animation, in the tradition of the Frankfurt School, gamers were pushed back into the field of creative industries, hierarchically belittled as "low culture" rather than "high culture" (Martel, 2010 ; Durand-Gasselien, 2012). Today, however, few would deny video games or animation an artistic label (Thi Nguyen, 2020). The 2024 predictions of the Activate Technology & Media Outlook show that there are already 2.6 billion gamers worldwide, and that this figure is set to rise sharply with the creative and production needs that this implies (WSJ, 2025).

However, there is cause for concern that this future production will focus primarily on "Triple A" ("AAA") games, largely dominated by a few studios, and not by a diverse eco-system with indie studios from diverse countries. This is an obvious risk, but one that should perhaps be put into perspective by the new production chains of the major studios, which increasingly rely on a "constellation of players" and an "infinity of agents". As

in publishing with "imprints", in cinema with "specialized units" or in music with "labels" (Auletta, 1997; Martel, 2010), the video game majors are tending to delegate an ever-increasing share of their content production to start-ups and independents, who in return obtain resources for their own projects. It's as if the major studios were becoming banks, holding copyright but delegating content production to their satellite structures. All these relationships are increasingly defined by "work for hire" and "project-based" contracts, with, as in the film industry, the increasing role of talent agencies and lawyers in codifying these contracts (Caves, 2000; Martel, 2010). This system, which contributes to the outsourcing of R&D and innovation, and then of creative production, is likely to spread to all industries and intensify to the point where no company will be either "major" or "indie", but both at the same time, in a veritable "constellation of players". Other, more recent and less optimistic studies see the situation of the self-employed artist worsening, despite this system. The virtuous nature – or not – of the relationship between majors and « indie » will be one of the key criteria for the years to come.

### 7. THE ARTIST IN THE METAVERSE

Much ado about nothing? A great deal was spoken around 2020–2021 concerning the flourishing prospects of the Metaverse. In recent years, much has been written about this revolution, which was presented as decisive, whereas AI has turned out to be far more important. Just a fad? That overall Internet transition to the metaverse calls for caution, as it shows us that a transformation announced as decisive can turn out to be disappointing and limited. One might have thought that, after the widespread buzz that accompanied the change of name of Facebook's parent company to Meta in October 2021, the metaverse was in decline. It lost its hype as early as 2022. And optimistic forecasts faded in 2023 and 2024.

At this point, it is advisable to avoid both overestimating and underestimating this evolution. Artistic creation in the metaverse remains an interesting opportunity, as it allows the widest possible deployment of immersive art. Its possibilities are infinite, and the resulting worlds are priceless in their opportunities and beauty (Grefe, 2024). Many experiments have already taken place with this in mind (Grand Palais immersif, Moment Factory, Excurio, Atelier des lumières etc.).

At present, the debate has shifted, as the future development of metavers, less publicized than before

but no less massive, is linked to generative AI. This is already true in the field of video games and e-sports, where the metaverse is a determining factor, with almost 400 million active users. "Virtual worlds, large-scale users, social interactions and sophisticated creation by users already exist today within video games" confirms a study (WSJ, 2024). The video games concerned are, for example, Roblox, Minecraft, Fortnite, World Warcraft, Zepeto, etc.

Generative AI would enable, beyond the video game sector alone, "faster creation and scaling of virtual worlds, lower barriers to entry and creation for all users, and a wide range of immersive social interactions". It also seems that "now that the metaverse has passed its media peak, companies are developing pragmatic and sustainable strategies for the metaverse, prioritizing investments in the context of their broader consumer engagement and technology development goals" (WSJ, 2024). There is also the question of the compatibility and interconnection of the various metaverses, which are currently unconnected, and which could become so thanks to third-party applications.

If, in ten years' time, the metaverse will primarily concern marketing, commerce/retail ("personalized visual store", for example), banking and healthcare, it could remain influential in the art. Ultimately, it is estimated that 600 million people will be in the metaverse by 2028 (WSJ, 2025).

Finally, another parallel evolution could take place: that of "space computing" through various devices (glasses, bionic eye implants, facial interfaces, corneal interfaces, retinal interfaces, neural interfaces...). We're talking here about virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR). The degree of immersion will certainly vary (Mixed Reality, or MR), but the movement is already underway in entertainment. New sectors could be involved: Virtual Travel; Socializing; Immersive Classes; Live Events etc. If these ideas still seem theoretical for the art world, we can nevertheless envisage, for example, that they will fundamentally transform the museum: we could visit a museum not only virtually, but physically, with a retinal interface that will change all perspectives and interpretations. Why, for example, not discover works of art through the eyes of a fly, which perceives 200 images per second with 360° vision? (Bousteau, 2023 [Wahler]).

## 8. THE ARTIST AND HIS QUANTUM COMPUTER

Another emerging paradigm is the quantum computer. This exploits the principles of quantum mechanics, such as superposition and entanglement, to simultaneously process massive quantities of information. Unlike conventional computers, which manipulate bits (0 or 1), quantum computers use "qubits", enabling exponential computing power to solve complex problems. The complexity of its implementation means that it will probably be another ten years before it becomes a reality, further delaying its effects.

Once completed, the quantum computer revolution could transform and accelerate fields such as cryptography or artificial intelligence, and open up unimaginable future avenues for art. Art generated by quantum code will be an even greater revolution than art generated by AI, experts predict (Bousteau, 2023 [Segal]; Chou, 2025).

## 9. ARTIST AS A COLLECTIVE

From time immemorial – as far back as Leonardo da Vinci's workshop – some artists have enjoyed working in teams and collectives. This is not necessarily self-evident, as artistic activity can also be perceived as profoundly individual (Putnam, 2000).

Yet "creative collaboration" is often at the heart of the creative process. The entire history of the Bauhaus (Frayling, 1993; Bois, 2004; Madoff, 2009), Black Mountain College (Harris, 2002; Bois, 2004; Madoff, 2009; Molesworth, 2015), Andy Warhol's "Factory" (Bois, 2004; Gopnik, 2020) or, more recently, Burning Man (Martel, 2016; Shister, 2019) attests to this fertile tradition.

It seems that this phenomenon is enjoying a new lease of life today, perhaps as a result of the dual digital and environmental transitions (Jones, 2015 [see Gilson] ; Wesseling, 2022 ; Bousteau, 2023 ). When the French president, Emmanuel Macron, launched the "Mondes nouveaux" project, inspired by the Work Progress Administration and Roosevelt's Federal One (Martel, 2006; Weckerle, 2008-note 1), the numerous applications from collectives they received surprised the project's leaders, including Bernard Blistène, former director of the Centre Pompidou's Museum of Modern Art in Paris (Blistene, 2023). Several hundred artists applied as a group, not as individuals, and several dozen were eventually selected. While no general trend can be

deduced from this single post-Covid initiative in France, it does at least attest to a growing interest on the part of some artists in working in groups.

These "collectives" can take innumerable forms, as one author's collective attempts to define them (Wesseling, 2022). They can be "collective organizations", "cybernetic communities", "platforms", "workshops", "artificial friendship" groups or "zoöp" communities. To this list we can add the "faitières" in French-speaking Switzerland, DIY collectives and countless collective projects in European counter-culture from Berlin to Milan, Madrid to London, Zurich to Geneva.

French artist Léon Biasiolo, born in 2000, for example, has created an artist's collective and a research collective around a project called "La Peyrigne", an artistic research and creation space located on his family farm in Berrac, alongside Louise Pereira Guerra and Matéo Guilbault (Bousteau, 2023 [Biasiolo]).

This "collectivization" of art is accompanied by another development: the decompartmentalization of artistic genres and disciplines. When artists work as a team, they can explore different art territories, straddling the plastic arts, performing arts, video or film, notably through installations and performances (Wood, 2018). A happy "mix of genres" sometimes emerges from these new crossovers made possible by the multiplication of the artist within a collective.

I hypothesize that this "trans-disciplinary" trend should develop in the years to come, as current practices in the visual arts already attest (Blistène, 2023; Bousteau, 2023). However, this break-up of art outside its traditional disciplines poses difficult questions for public authorities and foundations, as their funding models are still generally organized along disciplinary lines. Faced with interdisciplinary projects that they can't always fit into a specific box, they sometimes refuse to fund them. For its part, a few years ago Pro Helvetia inaugurated a new category named "Art +" in an attempt to evaluate this type of project presented outside the disciplines.

## 10. THE ARTIST AS A CURATOR

We have entered the age of "infinite art". Given the vast catalogs available at the click of a button for music, video games, TV series, cinema and even books, cultural criticism and artistic recommendation have been transfigured over the past twenty years or so (Rosenbaum, 2011; Martel, 2015b, 2018b; Wiener, 2023; Staley, 2024). Curation, "smart curation", influencers or algorithms:

we no longer, today, choose a film, a book, a piece of music or a show as we did in the last century. A report from Art Basel in 2024 confirms that 43% of purchases were made via Instagram (Art Basel, 2024). YouTube and TikTok are now the main sources of discovery for music, BookTubers for books, while podcasts also show great power of recommendation, prescription and influence. (See the following table.)

### Social network used to discover of music (U.S. market, 2023)

Tik Tok	73 %
Instagram	67 %
Facebook	49 %
Snapchat	31 %
X (ex Twitter)	21 %
Discord	15 %
Pinterest	14 %
Reddit	13 %
Twitch	12 %

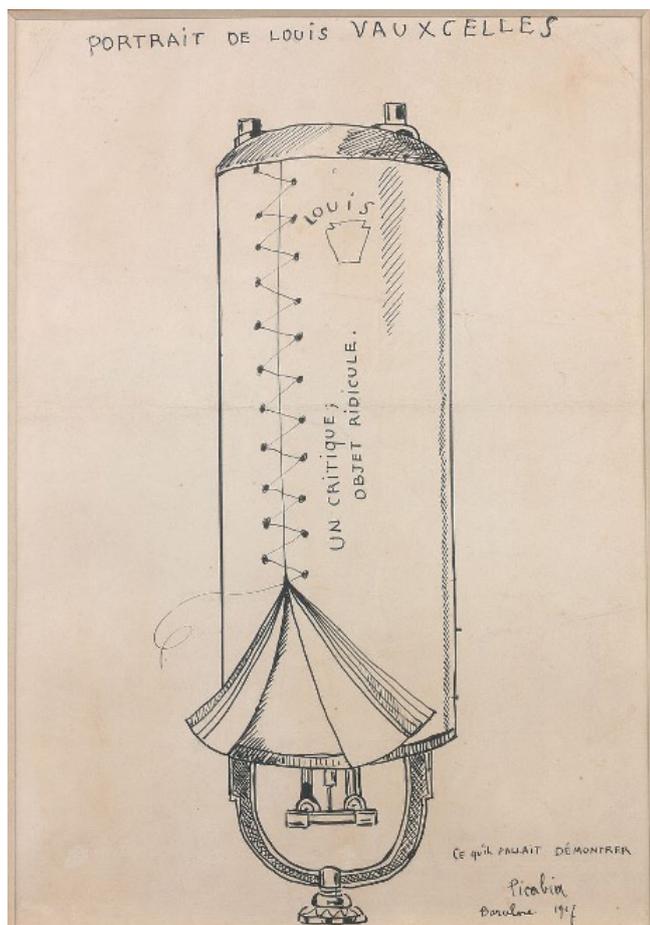
*Data: Activate Technology & Media Outlook, p. 163 (WSJ, 2025)*

Sometimes, and increasingly often, influencers aren't even humans anymore (Hsu, 2019; Chayka, 2024b). According to one recent prediction: "AI will further transform music discovery and consumption, moving from individualized music recommendations to fully personalized listening experiences. A significant proportion of music listeners will also be creators, many using AI-enabled tools. The music industry will take strong measures to protect its artists, as unauthorized AIs imitate the style, compositions and voices of well-known artists" (WSJ, 2025).

A number of studies and books have unveiled the problems caused by algorithms and the way they have "flattened" culture (Cardon, 2015, 2019; Christian, 2016; Chayka, 2024). Similarly, digital "bubbles" would lock consumers into their own tastes and prevent them

from diversifying their cultural practices (Pariser, 2011; Beuscart, 2019). Even if these researches have been called into question, with algorithms responding in the way they were programmed and the Internet also playing the role of a formidable disseminator of "indie" cultures and diversity (Martel, 2014; Coulangeon, 2021), the fact remains that social networks and GAFAMs are imposing their rules. This is particularly true of the "features" they have developed, generally unknown to the public, and which induce bias in search results or recommendations, for example at Amazon, TikTok, Instagram, LinkedIn, X or even Apple Music and Spotify (Packer, 2015; Pasick, 2015; Peters, 2016).

Faced with these "bubbles" and "features", artists are often forced to adapt to this new digital world. This is particularly true when it comes to making a name for themselves and, at the start of their careers, moving from anonymity to initial recognition, even within a "genre" or "niche". From this point of view, artists increasingly need to be their own curators, and manage to do without critics, as the Dadaist Francis Picabia imagined (drawing below).



(Francis Picabia, *Le Portrait de Louis Vauxcelles*, 1917).

In the process, and against all odds, the artist is becoming a brand – ironic for creators who have so often criticized capitalism or logos. The success of stars like Damien Hirst, Takashi Murakami, Urs Fischer, or, of course, Jeff Koons, and their interactions with major media groups (e.g. LVMH, Louis Vuitton, YSL, Rolex, Karl Lagerfeld, Hamilton etc.) attest to these unnatural cross-overs (Rubin, 2023; Abriat, 2025; Obadia, 2025).

## 11. THE LIVE ARTIST

In recent years, we've seen an upsurge in the number of live concerts, which has been accompanied by an increase in concert tickets and – surprisingly – in public interest. Covid undoubtedly played a part in this need for live concerts in the year following the pandemic, but it seems that this trend is continuing and growing.

Added to this, of course, is the music business model, which is changing. Today, artists are remunerated more on a live basis than before the digital switchover. The predictions for the live sector are therefore good.

According to figures from Activate Technology & Media Outlook and live research company Pollstar, "global consumer spending on live event admissions and experiences now exceeds \$110 billion worldwide (including \$15 billion for music). Consumers will continue to attend live events and experiences in the future, seeing this as a key way to socialize and celebrate special occasions. With increased demand for headliners, prices should continue to rise for the most profitable artists. For the music industry, this is estimated to reach \$18 billion by 2028 (for the US market), a significant increase" (WSJ, 2025; Pollstar).

New technologies are announced to make live concerts even more attractive (Intuit Dome, 3D Projections, Spatial Audio Systems, Holographic display...). All of which should enable the live concert sector to grow considerably in the years to come, and reach into other cultural domains.

Writers, for example, are increasingly called upon to perform on stage, whether through readings, children's stories or lectures. The same is true of visual artists and, to a lesser extent, actors and comedians in the performing arts. In all cases, writers and artists need to be fairly remunerated, and this remuneration needs to be better regulated and better paid. In France, for example, the government has introduced minimum rates for any writer's services, which even apply to conferences, signings or readings (Martel, 2015). It's on

these conditions of fair remuneration for creators that "live" can hope to grow everywhere, including in small venues, beyond the great globalized tours of rap or pop artists.

### **12. THE ARTIST AND HIS REMUNERATION FOR STREAMING MUSIC**

It's a common misconception among independent musicians that the remuneration they receive from YouTube, Apple Music, Deezer or Spotify is negligible, and that their business model has been considerably destroyed by streaming offers. Unscrupulous authors have repeated this antiphon without really examining the model (Hsu, 2024). And yet, it's a virtuous model!

We need to put this criticism into perspective. Firstly, it's clear that the streaming music market is not yet mature internationally (although it is starting to be in the USA and some European countries), and that it continues to suffer from piracy or from a fairly general sharing of connection "codes" that is detrimental to the sector as a whole. What's more, the price of a Spotify or Apple Music subscription is still relatively low (less than buying a CD a month), and is likely to continue to rise in the years ahead.

However, these reservations aside, the streaming model is not only viable and profitable for companies, but also virtuous for artists. Indeed, as some studies suggest, remuneration for listening to a track, however small, might become much more profitable than selling CDs, for three reasons:

1. The margin on the sale of a CD was limited due to the costs of CD production, the cost of the physical CDs themselves, their transportation, distribution and the percentage of sales in stores. In all, more than 50-60% of CD sales went neither to the record company nor to the artist (Rossman, 2012).

2. A CD purchase was a one-off purchase, regardless of the number of times it was listened to and the number of people using it in a household. Remuneration was therefore substantial, but one-off, and possession of the music unlimited in time. Moreover, radio airplay brought artists only limited royalties (Rossman, 2012).

3. The "second-hand" market was very large, and cassette piracy considerable.

4. Production and distribution costs are very low for a streaming music track, and even decrease considerably with the number of streams.

For all these reasons, the streaming model appears not only more sustainable but also potentially more lucrative for creators than traditional formats such as records or CDs – as streaming gradually reaches its critical mass. In January 2025, Spotify announced that it had paid \$10 billion to the music industry in 2024 alone (bringing the total to \$60 billion since its creation). If we add the revenues generated by Apple Music, Deezer, Qobuz, Amazon Music, Tidal, Pandora, YouTube music, IHeart Radio, Line Music (Japan), Melon (South Korea), Tencent Music (China), NetEase Cloud Music (China), Ximalaya (China), Baidu Music (China), Anghami (Middle East), JioSaavn (India), Gaana (India), Wynk Music (India), Boomplay (Nigeria) and so on... streaming has emerged as the dominant source of revenue in the music industry, eclipsing the financial peak once reached by CDs. If we add up these revenues, we can see that this model is truly virtuous.

Unfortunately, it is currently very difficult to make reliable calculations on how these platforms are remunerated artists, as the percentages vary considerably from one platform to another. Importantly, while roughly 70% of Spotify's revenues are redistributed to rights holders, the major record labels are the first to benefit, placing the burden on them to ensure that artists receive their due share. The main source of artists' frustration (and loss of income) lies not so much in the relationship between the streaming platforms and the artists, but between the right holders and the artists. The distribution of rights between the Majors and the artists, particularly for rights negotiated before the advent of digital technology, remains highly unfair, and the system needs to be overhauled.

It is likely that the streaming model will become increasingly virtuous as the streaming market matures (the goal of one billion paying streaming subscribers is a reasonable one for the coming years), and as the remuneration relationship between artists and majors improves. It is likely that platforms will increase their subscription prices and redistribution rates (especially YouTube, which pays music rights holders extremely poorly, compared with Apple Music or Spotify).

Finally, the so-called "market share model" could be replaced by the "User-Centric Payment System" (or UCPS), which offers remuneration that is more faithful to the exact remuneration of titles listened to, although existing studies show no real difference in terms of remuneration in quantitative terms, except for niche artists (CNM, 2021).

## II – THE ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION: THE GREEN ARTIST

In conclusion, it seems that the digital transition will continue to be one of the major transformations in the arts over the next ten years, just as it was during the first twenty-five years of our century. To anticipate future developments, it is important to keep a close eye on what is happening in the countries driving this digital transformation (notably the USA, China and Israel). It would therefore be wise for cultural players and artistic universities to forge partnerships in these three countries, to exchange knowledge as well as students and teachers. Only in this way will it be possible to anticipate the major changes taking shape.

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Artists have long demonstrated a sustained interest in nature (Bourg, 2014). One of the foundational texts on the role of art – Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *First Discourse* (*Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, 1751) – portrays the fine arts as artificial constructs that serve a society driven by competition, idleness, luxury, and material wealth. In Rousseau's view, the rupture between humanity (and thus between art and nature) constituted one of the core problems of the "Ancien Régime", a theme he would develop further in his *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* (1755).

Yet it wasn't until the first major reflections on ecology in the 1960s-1980s (Morton, 2019) and the rise of political ecology since the 1990s-2000s (Portney, 2015; Morton, 2021; Marder, 2024) that many artists began to place their art in an ecological perspective (Bois, 2004).

If we had to mention a date for this turning point, we could take that of the "Anthropocene Project" organized in Berlin in 2013-2014 at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW, or House of World Cultures). This project took note of a paradigm shift in the natural sciences with the advent of the "Anthropocene" and attempted to propose evolutions and new languages for art and culture. Over the course of a two-year project (2013-2014), HKW explored the multiple implications of this hypothesis for the sciences and the arts. Indeed, it was interesting that this debate should take place at the HKW, which is located precisely on the border line between East and West Berlin, where the Americans first exhibited works of "abstract expressionism". (A ZHdK professor, Anselm Franke, was at the heart of this adventure, which gave rise to countless debates and comments.)

Today, ecology has become a recurring theme in the artistic world, particularly in the visual arts (Bois, 2004; Blistène, 2023).

Thanks to ecology, there has been a real extension of the field of art. Environmental issues disturb, nourish, challenge and ultimately encourage artists in at least six directions, which I have had occasion to enumerate elsewhere (Martel, 2022a). Here, I summarize the main

points, while adding to and updating them.

### 13. THE ECO-RESPONSIBLE ARTIST

Cultural institutions and artists are called upon to act responsibly, and it's interesting to note that countless artists are now mobilizing in this area. It's a question of thinking about one's carbon footprint, reducing the number of exhibition catalogs published, avoiding discarding picture rails after exhibitions, or using environmentally-friendly materials.

In this respect, the issue of air transport often comes up, particularly with regard to the movement of works from one continent to another for exhibitions, but also of artists for their projects or their participation in biennales or conferences. From this point of view, the exponential growth of biennials since the 1980s raises questions: there are now over 300 biennials and more than 400 art fairs worldwide, and these figures are still rising. While they confirm the good health of the art market, they inevitably raise questions about artistic overproduction and carbon footprint.

From this observation, artists are looking for their way forward: some are trying to reduce their carbon footprint, others are proposing exhibitions in the meta-verse or using holograms, while others are changing materials or places of residence. The LUMA in Arles, founded by Swiss philanthropist Maja Hoffmann, has become a place for experimentation in this field, with impressive results that are setting an example everywhere (Obrist, 2021). Similarly, Bruno Latour's laboratory at Sciences-Po Paris (SPEAP) and the experiments of the "Où Atterrir?" collective have played a pioneering role in this field (Latour, 2015, 2017, 2020, 2022, 2025)

As for architects and designers, many are imagining green buildings, which necessarily involve a change in materials and "context", as star architect Jean Nouvel explains: "It's no longer possible to build the same thing everywhere in the world. It's the direction of history. We're finally moving towards the end of international style, of international cloning. I also believe that organic architecture will regain ground. By moving away from pure functionalism, we can create buildings that will be conceived as organs, adapted to a much more human way of living" (Bousteau, 2023 [Nouvel])

Other artists militate for a genuine aesthetic degrowth, which involves drastically reducing production, using recycled materials and countless other projects all aimed at protecting the planet. Public authorities

and foundations are encouraging such initiatives and funding them on an ever-increasing scale. In the years to come, we can expect to see such proposals multiply and become more widespread.

### 14. THE ARTIST AND THE ECO-WORK

The second trend underway in the art world in the ecological age is the consideration of environmental issues as a theme and subject for art.

This is nothing new, as nature (and even its protection) has been a rich theme since the beginnings of art history (Zhong, 2021). Indeed, artists have arguably been at the forefront of current ecological debates, and we need only recall the important role played by the Italians of Arte Povera from the 1960s onwards – we can even go back to Marcel Duchamp's "ready-mades" (Rousseau, 2024, p. 143).

Today, artists are taking ecological issues into account to such an extent that it would be difficult to list all those who contribute to this debate, even if the names of Ólafur Elíasson, Chris Jordan, Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno stand out. This trend is likely to intensify and diversify, making a positive contribution to the revitalization of the art world.

### 15. THE ARTIST AS ECOLOGICAL ACTIVIST

In addition to taking care of the planet and integrating ecological issues into their art, artists are increasingly taking part in actions to raise awareness of the environmental cause. This can be done through advocacy groups (such as the artists' collective "Le Bruit qui court") or, more simply, through personal "awareness-raising" and "outreach" actions.

Artists can champion the ecological cause by using their work to raise public awareness, or by becoming Gaia activists (promoting anything related with ecology). Some artists have already embarked on this path: Icelandic-Danish artist Ólafur Elíasson, American artist Chris Jordan and, to a certain extent, Argentine artist Pablo Reinoso. These initiatives are also encouraged by public authorities, foundations and institutions such as LUMA (Obrist, 2021).

Should we go further, as some artists' collectives are proposing? Some are attacking works of art, smearing them with paint in the name of the planet or mass tourism,

which is truly a "fuite en avant" for major museums, forcing them to multiply "blockbuster" exhibitions and always expanding with new "wings" (the Louvre museum has just announced pharaonic new extensions around its famous Cour Carrée).

A curious idea, and one that deserves to be examined here: is depriving museums of their foreign visitors, for example, a sustainable solution? The debate on this subject will be lively in the years to come, but it will undoubtedly pit environmentalists against those who believe that increasing the number of cultural visitors is a just cause. Seeing a work of art in person and "physically" remains an essential experience that nothing, neither technology nor Micro-folies (these projects to digitize works of art) will ever replace: seeing the Saint John the Baptist is a unique experience. Without the possibility of seeing works of art for oneself, the history of art will come to a halt – unless it is reserved for a small elite, as in Stendhal's time, when only the rich and literate could afford the "art trip" to Italy.

But our relationship with art is not just "Malrucian" (the adjective derives from André Malraux). It's also an economic model. Without tourists, museums and temporary exhibitions would no longer exist – and cultural funding would no longer be guaranteed. Foreign tourists, for example, account for around 30% of the Louvre's budget, not counting their spending in the museum's stores and restaurants. No one knows how we could replace this essential part of the budget.

### 16. THE ARTIST AND THE NEW ECOLOGICAL MEDIUM

The fourth development in the dialogue between artists and the environment is the transformation of the "medium" itself. Take the example of "Land art" or, again, Arte Povera (Michelangelo Pistoletto, Mario Merz, Jannis Kounellis, Alighiero Boetti or Giuseppe Penone, for example). Thanks to their early concern for the environment, these artists used new materials to create, always economically or with a low carbon footprint. Recycled products, organic materials, salvaged objects – the list goes on and on.

Artists from the "second generation" of Arte Povera also participate in this movement (see, for example, David Hammons and his "snowballs"). The work of Swiss artist Julian Charrière, halfway between Land art and Arte Povera, is also interesting in this respect. More recently, Bernie Krause has helped establish the

concept of "soundscape ecology" (by recording and broadcasting natural sounds). Other examples include Philippe Parreno, exhibition *Anywhere, Anywhere Out of the World* changed the space of the Palais de Tokyo. The same applies to artists such as Pierre Huyghe and Ólafur Elíasson, who are also part of this approach. Or Jean-Michel Othoniel, who has favored materials with reversible properties (since the Documenta in Cassel in 1992).

While this trend is likely to maintain its influence in the foreseeable future, the inherently digital and experimental character of contemporary art makes it unlikely to emerge as the exclusive paradigm.

### 17. THE LOCAL ARTIST

If the planet is under threat and our lifestyles and production methods are harmful to the environment, artists have sometimes chosen to contribute to the climate fight by relocalizing. In line with Bruno Latour's work on "local +", "local -", "global +" and "global -" (Latour, 2017, 2020, 2022; Martel, 2021b), countless artists are seeking to invent a new relationship with the world for themselves. Such initiatives, which revive a certain spirit of the 1960s and 1970s, are likely to multiply in the years to come.

### 18. THE ARTIST AND NEW FORMS

Finally, the sixth development we see in the field of art and the environment, and perhaps the most promising from the point of view of artistic innovation, is that which could give rise to new *forms*. Art, before being a medium, a theme, a success or an "entertainment", is first and foremost a *form*. In other words, an aesthetic, a path, a singularity. This is its primary *raison d'être*.

It's undeniable that the digital revolution has already given rise to new artistic forms in image, sound, video and many other fields. What about the ecological transition?

Artists are looking for new ways to reconnect nature and culture, which we humans have disconnected. To do so, they need to overcome a certain "anthropo-narcissism" or imagine, for example, a "culture of the living" (reconnection with the Earth). This approach has been explored by important philosophers such as Félix Guattari, or, more recently, by Philippe Descola or Baptiste Morizot, by exhibition curator Nicolas Bourriaud, as well as, once again, by Bruno Latour with his project

"You and I Don't Live on the Same Planet" at the Taipei Biennale in 2020, which he realized with Martin Guinand (Guattari, 1989; Morizot, 2018; Bourriaud, 2023; Latour, 2020). What essayist Nicolas summed up as follows: "with the living and its complexity finally placed as a priority, art becomes a human embassy among other forms of life".

### Conclusion

There's no doubt that the six directions I've listed above will provide prolific grounds for innovation by artists in the years to come. In fact, it's safe to say that whole swathes of contemporary art are moving towards a concern for the environment, in a variety of forms, and that this movement will intensify over the next ten years.

Nevertheless, I must underscore the concerns these initiatives continue to raise among numerous artists I have interviewed – concerns rooted in at least three key considerations. The first is an artistic objection, raised by artists themselves, who criticize this "fashion" and note that developments in terms of both "medium" and new "forms" are disappointing and too limited. "Green art" has not fulfilled its promises. We can hear these arguments, while making the hypothesis that artists will be able to respond to this criticism in the years to come.

The second, and more frequent, objection to this evolution is the refusal to accept the limitations of art in the name of the environment. Here we can place the social critics (Guattari, 1989) who refuse to allow artists to curb their creativity in the name of the environment. Should artists, even for ecological reasons, stop interacting with others and with the world? Preventing them from traveling, for example, or from taking planes because of the climate crisis, is hotly debated, as this global dialogue is intrinsically linked to their mission. As Swiss curator Hans Ulrich Obrist observes in *Ways of Curating*, their work is based on "social interactions" (Obrist, 2015) – although, of course, one can imagine that some artists prefer to stay at home or talk to no one. But Hans Ulrich Obrist himself has acknowledged that he has reduced his carbon footprint by traveling less (Obrist, 2023). Favoring long-term artistic residencies rather than biennials seems an interesting option, and one that many artists choose. But, for better or worse, travel remains relevant in the ecological age.

In the same way, it's probably reasonable to reduce the number of exhibition catalogs published, especially as many are offered in large numbers or pile up in the

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basements of contemporary art museums. Yet catalogs still have a *raison d'être*, even in the ecological age: they often remain, when not serving as communication tools for tourist offices, the only way for artists to convey their work and thought, and to leave a trace.

These debates are likely to intensify in the coming years, and there is a genuine risk that artists may, at times, find themselves ensnared by the very dynamics they help to shape. It is therefore essential to promote a form of thoughtful frugality, to foster new modes of experience, and to support meaningful transformations – undertaken with intelligence and purpose, not only in the interest of the planet but also in the service of art itself. Culture, after all, flourishes through movement and encounter. This must remain at the forefront of our thinking. What would be the point of saving "Gaia", animals and plants, if we abandoned what makes us human and distinguishes us from beasts, which is to say: culture? Anti-humanism is a dead end, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau was well aware, despite his two "Discourses". He believed in humanity, even if he loved animals, and his ecological message remains because the two "discourses" have been corrected by *Emile*, *Les Confessions* and *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*.

Ultimately, and despite our passage on earth in the belated Anthropocene era, it is undoubtedly essential to leave artists their freedom: they can make ecology a central element of their art or, on the contrary, not place it at the heart of their practices or themes. Here, we can speak of "biodiversity" in the deepest sense of the term: continuing to defend the diversity of viewpoints, aesthetics and freedom of artists (Martel, 2022a). And I believe that this debate on the extent of this freedom will be central in the years to come.

# III – THE ARTIST AND THE RISE OF POPULISM

The third fundamental trend that could be confirmed in the years 2025-2035 is the rise of "illiberal" tendencies, the word having been *coined* in an article in *Foreign Affairs* by Fareed Zakaria (Zacaria, 1997). To avoid essentialism, we should not speak so much of "illiberal states", but of "illiberal tendencies" which, if they exist strongly in Poland, Slovakia or Hungary, for example, are by no means absent in Germany (AFD and BSW/Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht), Switzerland (UDC), France (Rassemblement National, Reconquête) and, of course, Italy (Lega, Fratelli d'Italia). Developments in American politics since Donald Trump took office in January 2025 obviously extend this concern. It could even be said that our study takes on a new and fundamental importance as a result of the developments underway in the United States.

Faced with these developments, many players in the cultural policy arena – including the French Ministry of Culture, Italian theater networks, ELIA (the European network of art schools in higher education) and Pro Helvetia in Switzerland – are explicitly questioning the consequences that the rise of the extreme right in Europe could have on cultural policies and the lives of artists.

We are not, however, just talking about the future here: "illiberal cultural policies" have already been implemented in recent years in Poland, Hungary, Serbia and, more recently, Italy and Slovakia. These same trends exist also, as I've been able to observe in the field, in Bulgaria, Romania (where the far-right Alliance for the Unity of Romanians, or AUR, enjoyed a large success in the 2025 presidential election) or even in "Eastern" Germany, even though illiberal political parties are not yet in power there.

In order to understand the consequences that these "illiberal tendencies" are likely to have on the artistic world, and to measure its effects for the years to come, I travelled specifically to seven countries of the former "Eastern Europe" (Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, Slovakia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and "East Germany") in 2023-2025 to interview dozens of cultural players, artists and experts. The following pages are the product of this research.

## 19. THE ARTIST IN AN ILLIBERAL REGIME

Art and illiberalism don't mix! Generally speaking, the cultural situation in countries where illiberal tendencies are at work can be summed up by a growing mistrust of artists and their freedom of expression (sometimes even in the name of Trumpism-kind-of-freedom-of-expression), and a questioning of public funding for culture. This last element is even very characteristic of illiberal policies that see art as a domain "monopolized by the left" or the cultural extreme left, and which should therefore be purged. The measures implemented by Donald Trump since his return to power in 2025 reflect and reinforce this broader dynamic: significant cuts to federal cultural budgets; a call for the elimination of the National Endowment for the Arts, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and the National Endowment for the Humanities; increased federal control over the governance of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington; and the legitimization of certain instances of book censorship in public libraries...

In much the same vein, Slovakia's Minister of Culture, Martina Simkovičová, a former TV presenter (and close associate of Prime Minister Robert Fico), has been trying "to bring artists to heel" since her appointment (in the words of a Slovak artist) and to rein in Slovakia's cultural institutions (by ousting the incumbents and replacing them with supporters of the new government or personal friends). At the same time, she has resumed an ambitious policy of cultural cooperation with Russia and Belarus (suspended due to the invasion of Ukraine). Russian propaganda, notably via RT and Sputnik, has a strong presence in Slovakia, using methods that have already been well analyzed (Audinet, 2024).

Similar tendencies can be found in Viktor Orbán's Hungary, where he is publicly waging a veritable "cultural war" against the European Union (on the outside), and against artists accused of being leftists, gays or feminists (on the inside). It should be noted here that Orbán's first term in office was rather favorable to culture, with substantial funding and spectacular major works, even if it was to defend Hungarian culture, identity and language. It was not until his second term that he began to criticize the artists themselves. For an insight into these debates, I spend some time at Budapest's Mathias Corvinus Collegium, an ultra-conservative think-tank, that builds the intellectual and cultural project of Orbán and the extreme right-wing "Fidesz" (whose full name is

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Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Union, Orbán's party).

Since returning to power in 2010, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has systematically restructured the cultural and artistic landscape of Hungary to align with the ideological framework of his ruling party, Fidesz. Under Orbán's leadership, the Hungarian government has sought "to centralize cultural institutions, redirect public funding, and redefine national identity through a cultural lens rooted in traditionalism, nationalism, and Christian conservatism" (as confirmed by one of the key figures in Hungarian cultural policy). Key theatres, museums, and academic institutions have seen changes in leadership and programming that reflect government priorities, often marginalizing liberal, critical, or pluralistic narratives. The 2020 decision to place the University of Theatre and Film Arts (SZFE) under a private foundation led by Orbán allies sparked nationwide protests, symbolizing the broader trend of diminishing institutional autonomy. Simultaneously, laws and funding priorities have been increasingly designed to privilege cultural expressions that reinforce conservative family values and a heroic interpretation of Hungarian history, while discouraging contemporary, experimental, or progressive art forms.

At the intellectual core of this cultural reorientation lies, as previously noted, the Mathias Corvinus Collegium (MCC), a well-funded educational and think-tank institution that has become central to the ideological and cultural strategy of Orbán's regime. Positioned as an elite training ground for Hungary's future conservative leaders, the MCC has benefited from extraordinary state endowments, including millions in public assets and company shares (as detailed by several officials from the MCC whom I interviewed). Ostensibly independent, the institution functions as a nexus of right-wing thought production, promoting historical revisionism, cultural nationalism, and Euroscepticism in academic and media discourse. Its expansive publishing operations, fellowships, and international outreach efforts aim to cultivate an intellectual class loyal to Orbán's vision of illiberal democracy. The MCC's pedagogical model emphasizes ideological alignment over critical pluralism, fostering a cultural elite that reinforces the hegemonic narrative of Fidesz. In this sense, the Collegium exemplifies not only the politicization of knowledge in Hungary but also the broader ambition to institutionalize a durable cultural and art counterrevolution within Europe's liberal order.

Although not yet taken up by the parties in power, these same trends can be found, supported by opposition forces, in both Bulgaria and Romania

– countries that the specialist Ivan Krastev has described as "Frozen Democracy" (Krastev, 2024). In Sofia, the Ministry of Culture is severely under-resourced, as the researchers and artists interviewed told me. In addition, the population is declining sharply in medium-sized towns and rural or outlying areas, and there is strong emigration towards the three largest cities (Sofia, Plovdiv or Varna) and even more towards "Western" Europe, which tends to accelerate a "brain drain" process that is particularly strong in the field of the arts. The Bulgarian government is striving to rebuild local cultural networks, but the task is made all the more difficult by the fact that artists are the first to leave (Krastev, 2014, 2017, 2019; Ivanov, 2023).

In Romania, cultural policy remains classically aligned with Western European models, but very hostile rhetoric is multiplying in the name of "Greater Romania", against Hungarians or Gypsies, and there is a very strong influence from Russia. In 2025, Romania's cultural policy under President Nicușor Dan reflects a renewed commitment to European integration, democratic values, and the promotion of national heritage. Dan's administration has prioritized cultural diplomacy, exemplified by initiatives such as the Romania-Poland cultural season and the establishment of Romanian cultural institutes abroad, including in Serbia. Domestically, the government has operationalized funds from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) to support the rehabilitation of cultural institutions and heritage sites, aiming to modernize infrastructure and enhance cultural accessibility. Additionally, the declaration of 2025 as "The Eminescu Year" underscores a focus on celebrating national literary figures and fostering a cohesive cultural identity. These efforts signify a strategic alignment with EU cultural standards and a dedication to preserving Romania's diverse cultural landscape.

At the same time, however, Romania is witnessing the gradual entrenchment of markedly illiberal tendencies within its cultural sphere. Among the primary drivers of this ideological shift is the far-right Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR), which has sought to reconfigure the national cultural agenda through a discourse grounded in ultranationalism and social conservatism (as I was able to observe firsthand during two research visits to Romania in 2024 and 2025). Framing itself as the guardian of "authentic" Romanian values, AUR vocally challenges multicultural frameworks and expresses overt skepticism regarding European Union norms and influences. "It promotes a cultural framework grounded in

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Orthodox Christian values, calling for the reinstatement of moral and societal norms that are portrayed as deeply rooted in Romania's national legacy" (said to me Andrei Plesu, former minister of Culture and former minister of Foreign Affairs). In doing so, the party advocates a culturally homogeneous national identity, often at the expense of inclusivity and minority representation (they especially criticize LGBT culture). These developments have sparked critical debate about the erosion of cultural pluralism and the narrowing of public space for diverse expressions of identity. The stark contrast between the government's outwardly inclusive cultural initiatives and the far-right's exclusionary ambitions underscores a deeper contestation within Romania's political culture, as was revealed by the most recent, and notably tumultuous, presidential elections of May 2025.

In Germany, unspoken participatory programs are already attempting to correct inequalities in the under-equipped rural areas of East Germany (e.g. the "Aller. Land" program set up by the federal government's cultural delegation).

Generally speaking, the elements that systematically recur in the "illiberal policies" that I have observed in the field in the seven "eastern" countries that I visited, are the following:

- A critique of the left's monopoly of culture;
- A critique has been leveled against the elitist nature of art, which is often characterized as being detached from the cultural practices of the general populace, particularly those of rural communities – a perspective that has found some empirical support in the research (Katz-Gerro, 2012, 2015, 2016);

- A critique targeting artists' use of cultural "weapons" to advocate for contentious issues such as LGBTQ+ rights, gender theory, abortion, migration, and environmental causes. The criticism directed at these artists centers on their perceived militancy and activism, often sustained by public funding. Their affinity with "Black Lives Matter-style activism" is sometimes mentioned (and as a result, has drawn criticism) by some of my interviewees.

- Defense of the family, a value rejected by artists (according to illiberals).

- Criticism of secularism, even atheism, of artists who harm religious practice (recurring arguments of the Law & Justice party in Poland, for example).

- Sometimes a critique of the Jewish hold on culture, anti-Semitism either latent or publicly assumed, as can

be seen in Hungary;

- A defense of the West against the values conveyed by the Muslim world, but also by Iran, China or the "Global South" (Orbán deeply believes that the West is disappearing) : in this context, artists are portrayed as a hostile entity – a Trojan horse – allegedly embracing these post-colonial or pro-Islamist ideas with the intent of subverting Western values.

It is interesting to note, however, that in addition to these criticisms voiced by the "illiberals", which can be described as "conservative" or even "reactionary", there are objections considered more "progressive": the rejection of globalization, free-trade treaties and neo-liberalism, of which the artist would be a hypocritical defender (the name of Jeff Koons always comes up in these circles and these critics); a criticism of the United States and its model of diversity or integration (the name George Soros is frequently reviled, for example, which in this context can be understood as a form of antisemitism); criticism of GAFAM and its monopoly that harms local identities, small languages or traditions. We can clearly see here a form of love-hate for the United States, very revealing of these "illiberal" movements.

This dual critique – emanating from the extreme right and, somewhat surprisingly, at times also from the radical left – coalesced notably in the electoral success of Donald Trump in 2024. It is thus surprising that the new President of the United States should be perceived as an ally by European illiberal regimes, in light of his bombastic declarations directed against Europe (Riley, 2023). As several analyses have shown, Trump has also managed to appeal to part of the traditional Democratic electorate by appearing "anti-system" and rallying countless counter-cultural communities around him (the "anti-system" neo-hippies, certain hipsters and geeks, libertarians from New Hampshire or Maine, Miami Cubans, gamer communities, rodeo and casino enthusiasts, DIY practitioners etc.). The influence of key intellectual figures – such as Curtis Yarvin (aka Mencius Moldbug), Peter Thiel, Steve Bannon, and others associated with the so-called "techno-reactionary" or geek/hipster right – attests to the porous boundary between the countercultural sphere and the Trumpist far right. Their ideas have significantly shaped the ideological framework underpinning Trump's political project, reflecting a convergence of digital-age libertarianism, reactionary thought, and populist nationalism. It's very important to understand this point to anticipate the consequences this will have in illiberal regimes to come

(Press, 2024).

Finally, there is the question of "freedom of expression", which will undoubtedly be one of the key issues for the years to come. In his speech at the Munich Security Conference (February 2025), US Vice President J.D. Vance denounced the weakening of freedom of expression in the Old Continent, and took the US model, in particular its "First Amendment", as his model. Paradoxical or misguided as his argument may be, it is clear that it has had a major impact on whole swathes of European society, who feel themselves the victims of "wokism", "political correctness" or "cancel culture" (these notions, paradoxically, have all been imported from the US). Artists are caught between criticism that they no longer respect "freedom of expression" and their own sense that they no longer have the right to express themselves freely. At the end of the day, the infringement of freedom of expression is always the fault of the other, with each of the players in this complex debate blaming the others for the decline in freedom of expression... a rhetoric that is emblematic of illiberal regimes.

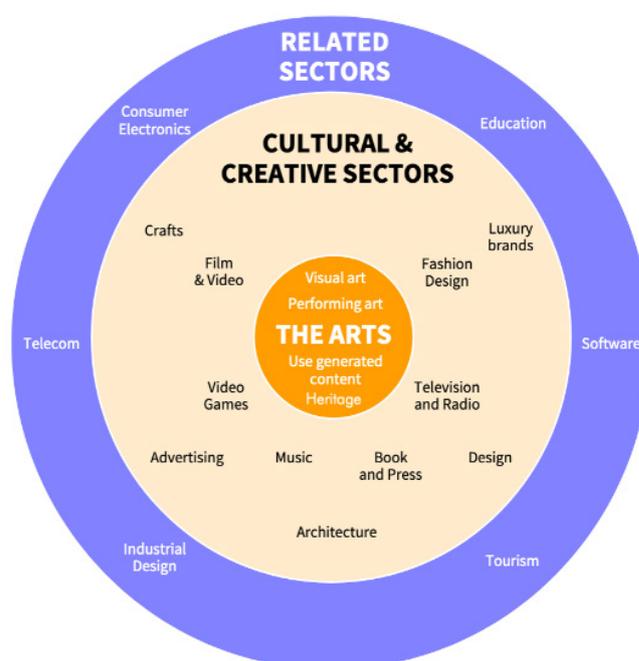
How to prepare artists for the risk of living in an "illiberal" regime, and how to analyse the proliferation of these ideas: these are the two themes I'd like to address here, as they no longer belong to theoretical debates, but could become realities in certain Swiss cantons, France, Spain or certain German Länder in the years to come. And in so doing, I think it's urgent to revisit the question of the role of art and artists in society.

Before proceeding further, I believe it is essential to reaffirm one of the fundamental values of art and artists: freedom of creativity. Under no circumstances – and for no reason, except within the strict limits defined by the law – can any restriction of this freedom be accepted. (That said, it is worth acknowledging that the law itself has not always been neutral or protective in this regard : the cases of Baudelaire, Flaubert, Rimbaud, or Joyce serve as enduring reminders that legal frameworks have, in certain historical contexts, curtailed artistic freedom and censored literary expression, a tendency which exists today in China, Russia, Cuba, as well as in Algeria, Venezuela or many other countries.)

This basic principle of freedom of creation must hold true whether in the context of illiberal regimes, or when it comes from the political right or left. In my view, this is the foundational principle – one from which all others must derive.

## 20. THE ARTIST AND HIS VALUE

The first thing for artists to do when they live – or will live – in an illiberal regime is to reaffirm the value of their art. We've known for a long time that culture is measured not only by the intrinsic value of the cultural products and services it offers, but also by the benefits it brings to the community, in terms of tourism, attractiveness, exports, innovation, economic development, education and so on. This is the famous theory of concentric circles, which highlights the effects produced by art (World Bank, 2021; Weckerle, 2024). See the graph below, taken from a publication by Invest EU (EIF, 2018).



It should be remembered here that culture has several types of impact, which explains why cultural policies are central to public policy (Crossick, 2016; Rosenstein, 2018; Müller, 2024):

1. A cultural impact (artistic quality, diversity, vitality).
2. A social impact (in terms of quality of life and social life in a neighborhood, for example; in terms of social mobility, cultural diversity, regeneration of community space, etc.) (Taylor, 2015). These impacts have been fairly well measured, with an original method, by Economics Nobel Prize's Esther Duflo (Duflo, 2010a, 2010b, 2011).

3. An economic impact (in terms of jobs, exports, tourism, soft power, etc.)

It is undoubtedly important to recall these three impacts to respond to the recurrent criticism of the artist's uselessness or political bias. We can also point

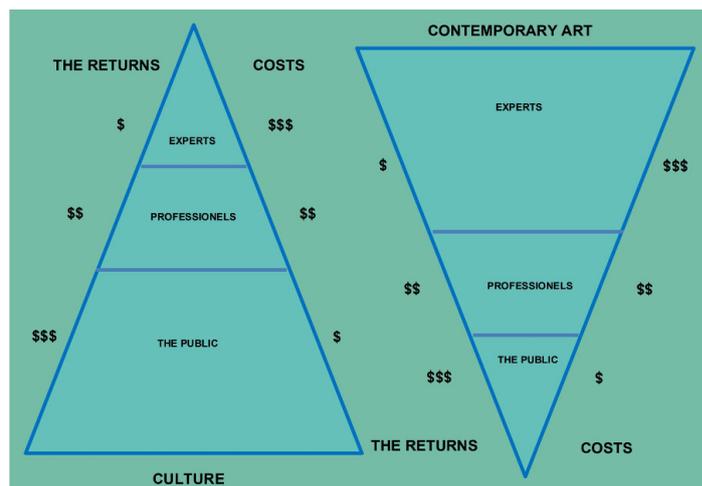
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to the great diversity of artists, who cannot be reduced to a single trend, as illiberals often do. In contemporary art, Jeff Koons is just one artist among many; and there are Catholic artists, anti-LGBT artists, nationalist artists etc. Everyone has their own idiosyncrasies, egos and ideas, and it's a mistake to caricature them (Koren, 2018; Obadia, 2025).

Moreover, there is an international influence component that is of particular interest to illiberal regimes (and sovereigntists): that of « soft power » (Nye, 2004, 2011). Numerous countries have in fact invested considerable resources in efforts to shape global perceptions – starting with the United States, but also including Japan (Cool Japan Strategy, 2012 ; New Cool Japan Strategy, 2024 ; Japanese Government, 2024), China (Martel, 2010), and many others. This might also emerge as a new direction for artistic engagement and production.

Some of the people I've interviewed in "illiberal" countries believe, on the contrary, that by claiming to assign concrete objectives to artists, or by attempting to measure the impact of cultural policies, we would be mistaken. When this objective fails (democracy, for example) or does not meet its objectives (education, social), then the legitimacy of art collapses. Critics argue that the increasing expectation for artists to pursue "social" or "environmental" goals risks compromising the intrinsic purpose of art. They advocate a reorientation towards art's more fundamental role as an autonomous domain, governed by its own agents, forms of legitimacy, and systems of evaluation – namely, fellow artists, critics, and to some degree, the public. According to this perspective, art serves purposes that transcend social, economic, or environmental agendas, and it is essential that it be preserved within its distinct and self-regulated sphere.

Should we return to a culture that speaks to all, or on the contrary to an art that speaks to "peers"? The table below clearly illustrates this debate, with "contemporary art" being the subject of countless polemics for this very reason:



(Graphic borrowed from a presentation by Maria Finders at LUMA, Arles).

In any case, these debates raise the question of the function of art and the role of the artist more urgently than ever. Should they contribute to strengthening democracy? Should they be involved in social or educational action? Should they promote ecology? Should they promote the integration of communities within the nation? In general, illiberal regimes's advocates answer these questions in the negative.

## 21. THE ARTIST AS SOCIAL DOCTOR (ART AND HEALTH)

If we defend the idea that the artist should be a social reformer, contributing through his or her missions to a better society, then we can put forward the hypothesis of the development of new territories for art in the years to come. Indeed, there is a fundamental trend in the cultural world: that of the splintering of the arts into innumerable directions. This centrifugal trend is reflected in the rapprochement between art and science, art and gastronomy, art and sport, art and business (Grand, 2016; Weckerle, 2024), art and the city via the concept of the "smart city" or "creative city" (Towsend, 2013 ; Halgoua, 2020), art and international influence or soft power (Iwabuchi, 2002; Nye, 2004, 2011; Soft Power, 2019; Pecqueur, 2020; McClory, 2021) or art and health.

This development, sometimes dubbed "Art +", is destined to have a great future, given the cultural needs in many areas of social life, and because art corresponds to a "new spirituality", a new religion, at a time when religions are loosening their grip on people – an inversion that Max Weber first predicted with his theory of the "disenchantment of the world", in which he discusses the place of art (Max Weber, 1917, 1919); this theory strongly

influenced Marcel Duchamp (Rousseau, 2024, pp. 179-181). The writer André Malraux, France's first Minister of Culture, came to the same conclusions a few years later (Malraux, 1935, 1947, 1972, 1996). Last but not least, Oscar Wilde had already theorized at the end of the 19th century, notably in *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* and *De Profundis*, that the artist was a kind-of-a-new Christ.

Let's focus here on one of these new territories for art, since we can't go into detail on all these developments at once: the question of health, to take just one example, and to avoid enumerating all the social possibilities of art.

Among art's new territories, hospitals and healthcare are having a major impact (WHO, 2019, 2021). Because of Covid, the interaction between art and health has taken on a growing dimension (ILO, 2020, 2023; OECD, 2020; Weckerle, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d; Voldere, 2021; EY, 2021), offering countless prospects for both art (its relationship to "care", its social mission) and hospitals (therapeutic arts, arts for hospitalized children, art in psychiatry...).

Although the interactions between culture and health are not new – they were institutionalized politically in France, for example, by Minister Jack Lang in 1984 (Martel, 2021) – the Covid-19 crisis seems to have brought them back into focus. The pandemic has, for example, revealed the demands of patients, particularly in hospitals, for better support with the arts [WHO, 2019; OECD, 2020; Florida, 2020; EY, 2021; ILO, 2020]. Previously, the AIDS movement and certain cancer associations, featuring a prominent artistic component, had contributed to advances in patients' rights as well [Martel, 1996, 2000]. There is thus a longstanding tradition of "art care," exemplified by the photographic works of Nan Goldin, among others.

Many artists have taken up these issues and developed projects, often in collectives, linking art to health, care, healing or repair: a trend confirmed by the projects proposed or selected by "Mondes Nouveaux" (Blistène, 2023).

It would be interesting to explore these issues in greater depth, both by mapping the current interactions between art and healthcare, and perhaps even contributing to the creation of an innovative venue in this field (as the Pitié-Salpêtrière hospital in Paris is currently attempting to do). This raises a whole series of key questions: can and should culture be promoted in hospitals, and for what reasons? Can we speak of a cultural policy for hospitals? Should this policy be

implemented directly by hospitals, mainly with non-professional artists (choirs, exhibitions, psychiatric drawings, poetry readings, etc.), or should hospitals form partnerships with professional museums, orchestras or dance companies?

Finally, who will fund cultural projects in hospitals: health insurance companies, municipal cultural departments, the hospitals themselves or arts organizations (given that this forms part of their outreach policy funded by public authorities or foundations)? As we can see, this new art territory is an interesting one: it raises compelling questions and is likely to become a focal point of debate and development in the coming years.

## 22. THE ARTIST AS A NEW DADA

In response to these social and societal transformations, one can envisage an alternative trajectory embodied by the rebellious, kind-of-Dadaist artist. Confronted with an illiberal regime, the artist assumes in this scenario a role of resistance, mobilizing autonomous forms of self-defense. This entails the revitalization of a long-standing strategy of cultural resistance that stretches from Duchamp to Warhol, and from Beuys to Ai Weiwei. A recent volume dedicated to "political" artists, titled *Reinventing the World*, catalogs numerous critical practitioners and calls for an intensification of this mode of rebellion (Kholeif, 2018).

Criticism of the market, money and the "mainstream" has always resonated strongly in culture, even if artists have often worried about their remuneration (Sen, 1993; Boltanski, 1999; Nussbaum, 2010; Pattaroni, 2020). Indie culture, with its zine bookshops, hardcore punks, squatters and poetry readings, retains its credentials. Just think of the Living Theater, the Wooster Group, ABC No Rio, the CBGB club and the *Village Voice* in New York (Gorman, 2022) or festivals like Burning Man or SXSW (Blackstock, 2011), to take just a few enduring American examples.

Artists have been accused of losing their counter-cultural roots and falling into the most brutal form of economy "laissez-faire". They've been accused of trading joints for cocaine, and cocaine for heroin. They've been blamed for contributing to the gentrification of SoHo, East Village, TriBeCa and even Dumbo and Williamsburg. And this criticism is made very often in "illiberal" regimes. The anti-Trump protest led by artists during the president's first term, and which seems to be reviving today with particular virulence, points to an alternative (Roussel,

2019). Instead of accepting such attacks, some artists propose to radicalize their approach, reaffirming the alternative dimension of art and its "agitprop" character.

The art world has always been linked to the avant-garde, and the role of the artist as "social disrupter" is well established. In the 19th century, and even more so in the 20th, a long tradition of rebellious artists made headlines, whether we think only of the Zutists, the Dadaists, the Surrealists, the Bauhaus, Guy Debord's Situationists, or the performances, happenings and "actions" of the Fluxus movement and Joseph Beuys, who was a master of agit-prop (Antliff, 2014; Borer, 1970; Mesch, 2017).

However, although certain scholars continue to place disproportionate emphasis on the activist role of the artist, calling for its revival (Le Chevallier, 2024; Emelife, 2022), others see it more as a form of exhaustion, a popular theme in "illiberal" lands, and one that has long since been initiated by a whole series of conservative critics (Domecq, 1999, 2009; Olivennes, 2021). These exhaustions, according to these same critics, herald other future art forms, since artists are said to have reached an impasse, either becoming mere political and militant collectives (and thus abandoning any artistic pretensions), or losing themselves in a superficial and conventional critique, purely repetitive, of what their predecessors have done.

Other, more perceptive thinkers, such as art theorist Nicolas Bourriaud, have hypothesized that the future of art will lie in "the dissolution of artistic activity into non-specialized objects". "This was the dream of the twentieth-century avant-gardes: the end of art as a specialized activity", explains Bourriaud (Bourriaud, 2023). And he cites the three billion photos posted every day on social networks, which could eventually, through the resulting saturation of images, put an end to the history of "art".

The end of art history? Let's not exaggerate! Let's just point out a few debates which are present in illiberal regimes and which are likely to persist durably in the years to come.

– One may or may not defend the argument that an artist should be free of any activism, and that these two spheres – the artist sphere and the activist sphere – should be kept as separate as possible (I'll argue on this matter in the conclusion). Many of the threats to culture today (from the rise of populism and extreme parties that want to regiment artists, to the attempts of financial markets to regulate the art world, to developments in China, Russia, Iran and so many illiberal regimes) revolve

around this issue. It remains true that, as artists are citizens like any others, it is challenging to restrict their engagement with social causes or specific issues, as well as their use of art as a medium to communicate their messages.

But there's a big difference, some would argue, between artists who carry political messages or defend causes (e.g. Picasso, Ai Weiwei, Pierre Huyghe or Olafur Eliasson) and activists like the Russian Piotr Pavlenski, who nailed his testicles to Moscow's Red Square, or even the Pussy Riots, who are no longer necessarily in the art business, but are certainly in the agitprop business (we should defend the Pussy Riots, but less as artists than as activists, in the name of freedom of expression, as noted by a number of individuals I interviewed).

Linked to Act-Up, David Wojnarowicz was an artist-activist in the fight against AIDS, and has been strongly criticized by illiberal America, as were artists Andres Serrano (and his famous work Piss Christ), Tony Kushner (and his play Angels in America) or Nan Goldin (and her exhibition Witnesses to Our Vanities) – all four are widely recognized by critics and scholars as significant figures in the artistic field (Martel, 2006). Ai Weiwei, a Chinese dissident, rages against the Chinese Communist Party's censorship and doublespeak – and he is subject to intense persecution by the Chinese Communist Party domestically, and internationally he continues to be confronted by cultural operatives acting on behalf of the regime. As for Ernest Pignon-Ernest, he has embraced every dissident figure, from Rimbaud to Pasolini, or Che Guevara. Finally, Maurizio Cattelan criticized the Vatican, the rules and even the rules of the arts ("Comedian"). But in every case, however committed and opinionated these artists may be, they have prioritized *form* over "content" – the hallmark of great artists. Each of them invented new artistic *forms*.

Perhaps the debate between art and activism needs to be posed in these terms, and refocused on the defense of artistic form and quality? This will undoubtedly be one of the key issues of the years to come.

## 23. THE ARTIST AS A 'DESIRING MACHINE'

In the same vein, but from a less frontal perspective, some have put forward a new posture for the artist, which could be described as a "Deleuzian" attitude. We know that the work of the philosopher, and often that of his colleague Félix Guattari, continues to have a decisive

influence on artists – particularly their substantial work *Mille Plateaux* (Deleuze, 1980). In addition to the frequent analogies this book has prompted (it is said to sum up Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers' Centre Pompidou in Paris, or to be the matrix of today's Internet), Deleuze and Guattari's key concepts provide the artist with myriad possibilities to exist elsewhere – to drift, evade, circumvent, or ultimately disengage from the illiberal real world. Here, I'll simply recall a few of their key concepts:

- "multiplicity": this is not a synonym of plurality, but a new, complex unit;

- the "rhizome": using this image of the plant-tree-root, Deleuze-Guattari shows non-hierarchical and non-centric thinking, which allows for new connections;

- "desiring machines": a psychoanalytical term linked to desire, which makes it a collective, plural and material element, and not, as in Freud, the product of a lack;

- "territorialization"/"déterritorialisation"/"reterritorialisation": a relationship with a given space, which can help to break down established structures and enable them to be reconfigured differently;

- "nomadism": a way of being outside fixed structures and established identities, constantly on the move (see: Zourabichvili, 2003).

Based on these concepts, which are by no means fixed, and which are constantly evolving, mirroring Deleuze's dynamic philosophy, the artist can move or stand back from the debates imposed on him and the rules assigned to him. A phrase by Marcel Duchamp may illustrate this paradoxical destiny of the artist in the illiberal age: "The great artist of tomorrow will go underground" (Rousseau, 2024, p. 182).

## 24. THE ARTIST AND HIS MFA (PROFESSIONALIZATION)

Another response by artists to illiberal attacks could be professionalization. This strategy would be in the opposite direction to Joseph Beuys' view that "Every human being is an artist" (Antliff, 2014; Borer, 1970; Mesch, 2017) or even – although he shouldn't be taken seriously here – Marcel Duchamp (Rousseau, 2024). The debate about the professionalization or specialization of the artist is an old one (Madoff, 2009) and it is possible to regard both parameters as complementary to one another : the artist must both find his singular voice (specialization) and be part of a wider ecosystem (general professionalization), in which he can evolve

before finding his way. The "majors"/"minors" system developed in most art schools is precisely designed to offer this dual entry point.

Professionalization offers artists another opportunity: it gives them time to think about their work over the long term, and time to create or find their voice as an artist. This is the other imperative of the artist's life: he needs a "positive economy" in the long phase of experimentation and research, periods of testing and finally the right to fail that constitutes his period of apprenticeship and maturation – moments inherent to the artist's life that can last several years (Martel, 2018; see also Marcel Duchamp's life on this matter [Rousseau, 2024, p. 143])

It's important to point out here that innovation, whether scientific or creative, is generally based on a "stable" foundation. You can hardly innovate from scratch, or without a minimum professional or economic base. Since innovation takes place "from the ground up", it's important to help artists find this stability, and professionalization can help.

As exemplified in this scenario, the artistic response to illiberal developments is to reaffirm the artist's seriousness through a degree and the acquisition of academic legitimacy. Since the 2000s, the Master of Fine Arts (MFA) has become the indispensable training for most artists in the U.S., a degree as important to success as the MBA for a business student (Martel, 2019, 2014). Can and should this approach be explored in Europe? That's up for debate. Yet it seems that this trend is already underway in most art schools. It has been well analyzed by Pro Helvetia in Switzerland: the number of artists continues to grow, art schools are multiplying (especially private ones), while the number of permanent jobs is not increasing (Pro Helvetia, 2005, 2010).

This professionalization is welcome in principle, but even more so in view of the impoverishment of artists (Bertrand, 2024) and the rise of illiberal regimes. The widespread use of the MFA diploma as the key to a career in the arts also opens up the possibility of adjacent careers for its holders. This is true of the field of "strategic creativity", at the interface between business and culture, which enables the creation of "creative value" (Weckerle, 2024). This is also true of all the "cultural engineering" professions – in the broadest sense of the term, which includes consulting, legal and financial assistance, tourism, urban development and so on – which have proliferated since the 1980s, offering work opportunities to artists who have yet to break through (Carpentier,

2025).

In contrast to this move towards specialized diplomas, some art schools insist on "cross-disciplinary" approaches, in order to avoid borders and question siloed organizations, each in their own "swim lane" (as they say). CalArts, in the United States, has developed this type of "cross-disciplinary" curriculum (Madoff, 2009, p. 107). But when you think about it, professionalization and a non-specialized approach are not necessarily contradictory when it comes to teaching and MFA: they can actually be complementary.

In addition to the question of diplomas, there's another debate: that of teaching. Should an artist teach, and can he or she be a good teacher? This question was often discussed with my interlocutors. There are some excellent artists who teach (Julien Creuzet at the Ecole des Beaux Arts de Paris) and some whose students like to see their work but not necessarily attend their classes. Sometimes, it's the artists' business model that motivates them to teach; other times, it's contact with students, the possibility of collective work or opportunities to be challenged that drive them. However, there is a risk, particularly for less talented artists, of operating in a vacuum, and for art universities of fostering a system of endogamy (these remarks originate from several interviewees and are summarized here for conciseness): these artists were trained, for example, in an art school by over-valuing the "indie" nature of their art; once on the job market, they didn't find an economic model and a "positive economy" (Markusen, 2006); they produced "films that are more interesting to write than to watch", "books for writers" or "project proposals" and failed; here they are again back at university as teachers, first as "assistant professors", then as professors, where they reproduce the same "indie" pattern that prevented them from succeeding and train as many students who, in turn, won't find work etc. This pattern was analyzed early on by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1964, 1970, 1979) and such a debate is well known in the United States, where some universities have resorted to fairly radical methods to avoid this endogamy, such as avoiding recruiting their own former students as teachers or favouring only professionals who have been brilliantly successful in their careers, for example at CalArts, USC, UCLA or NYU's Tisch School (Negroponte, 1995; Etzkowitz, 2002, 2008; Martel, 2010).

In all cases, with or without an MFA, there is a general trend towards the attenuation of hierarchies in art schools between the artist-teacher and the artist-student

(Madoff, 2009, p. 109).

Finally, a word must also be said here about a new movement that has been a major trend for several years: that of "Research Arts" (Wesseling, 2022). Today, an artist can support an MFA or a thesis in this category, and some foundations (Pro Helvetia, for example) fund this type of creation. This is an essential dimension because, in addition to the medium-term funding it can offer artists, it enables long-term "Research and Development" (R&D) to imagine the future of art (Etzkowitz, 2002, 2008). In a world that offers few R&D spaces for artists, Research Art seems to be a very positive development.

In short, MFA, research art and teaching are possible solutions for artists – and sometimes dead ends. This debate on the future of art schools is likely to continue in the years to come (Madoff, 2009; Moss, 2011; Purushothaman, 2021; Weckerle, 2024). And to prepare for it, it would be interesting to commission a general study on the articulation between universities and the arts in their various registers (teaching, development of amateur practices, "presenters" of professionals, R&D and innovation...). This work has already been initiated here and there, particularly in relation to the American model (Martel, 2006, 2006b, 2010, 2014), and ZCCE may commission such an article about art and universities in Switzerland in the near future.

## 25. THE ARTIST AND HIS "COMMUNITY"

In the face of illiberalism, should we withdraw into our own community instead of opening up to others, to society and to the university? This brings us to another discussion. The history of art includes countless artists who speak both about and for their communities. Christian Boltanski, for example, is interested in the Jewish condition after the Holocaust (see his fantastic piece "Les habitants de l'hôtel de Saint-Aignan en 1939", among many); Nan Goldin has told the story of her "family" decimated by AIDS in the 1980s (in her own way, continuing the work of Robert Mapplethorpe and David Wojnarowich); Glenn Ligon evokes the lives of black Americans and the conflicting identities that arise from them (and sometimes multiple identities: he is black and openly gay); Sophie Calle returns to her chosen kinship, which includes, in addition to her parents placed at the center of her work, her sister, her husbands and other transient lovers. The same is true of Salman Toor, who chronicles the "non-ordinary" lives of his gay friends in

Pakistan (Toor, 2020; Toor, 2022). Or Cindy Sherman, who recreates her biography in multiple characters.

All these names and a few others have also been criticized in illiberal regimes, and some (photographers Nan Goldin, Robert Mapplethorpe, Andres Serrano, playwright Tony Kushner, the NEA Four) were even deprogrammed or censured during the "culture wars" in the US (Martel, 2006).

More recently, the relationship between artists and their personal, intimate or family history has given rise to numerous projects: a trend confirmed here too by the "Mondes Nouveaux" candidates (Blistène, 2023).

Is it problematic to speak on behalf of one's community or to adopt its codes? David Hockney or Gilbert & George have done so for the gay community; Christian Boltanski for the Jewish community; Kehinde Wiley for the black community etc. Feminism, the LGBT question, the queer question or the trans question are at the heart of many issues here (Doonan, 2019 ; Mullins, 2019; Katz, 2024); sometimes these issues merge in what we're used to call "intersectionality", for example feminism and the colonial question (Vergès, 2019). Is this a problem? I don't think so, because each time, these artists have done so in a non-communitarian mode, transcending their community identities and cultures. They have privileged the "multiple identities" of which Amartya Sen speaks (Sen, 2006).

The fact remains that this closeness between artists and their "community" (in the broadest sense of the term), and the enhancement of that community by artists, seems to have taken on greater importance today. If we take as an example Art Review's list of the 100 most influential people in the art world in 2023, we see that a significant number of the personalities on this list, as the magazine itself acknowledges, represent/speak/assume/belong to a community (Paul B. Preciado, Darren Walker, Achille Mbembe, Nan Goldin, Judith Butler etc.). The magazine's 2024 list confirms this trend once again.

The question here is: how do you speak to all these audiences at the same time, both by community and to all communities at once? That's the challenge. Finally, there are those who believe that we are entering a post-gay, post-LGBT (Butler, 1990), post-feminist, post-colonial world, and that young artists mustn't stick too closely to current issues, or risk being later left behind (several of my interlocutors put forward this argument). As one can see, the debate is wide open.

## 26. THE POSTCOLONIAL ARTIST

The debate surrounding art and postcolonialism warrants particular attention, as it has become increasingly prominent within the contemporary art world. It is also frequently invoked – albeit often implicitly – through the terms "woke" and "wokism", which have come to serve as rhetorical targets for today's illiberal regimes. Contrary to countless sterile contemporary polemics, the reference to the word "woke" should not arouse animosity as such. If it's simply a question of being "vigilant" and "attentive" to manifestations of racism, sexism, or homophobia, it seems natural enough for artists to define themselves as "woke". What, on the other hand, may provoke a more legitimate reaction is the debate on "freedom of expression" (often caricatured as "cancel culture"), i.e. the desire to forbid someone to express themselves, in the name of this or that position, or sometimes because of their gender or race. The complex issue of "cultural appropriation" also arises from a slightly different angle (Young, 2007; Attia, 2023)

In a similar vein, the concept of "cultural rights" has emerged in recent years. This is a further development of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which already valued "cultural life" and defended the right to "enjoy the arts" (Article 27). This still broad idea was defined more precisely by UNESCO in 2001, in its Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. "Cultural rights" are explicitly mentioned, with everyone having the right to "create and disseminate their works", to develop their "cultural identity" and to "engage in their own cultural practices". From then on, the notion was established and gradually gained acceptance within Unesco (it was further defined in the Unesco Convention on the "Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions" in 2005, followed by the Fribourg Declaration on Cultural Rights in 2007). The expression "cultural rights", which is less legal than philosophical, is interesting because it aims to give concrete expression to "cultural diversity". Every people is the bearer of a culture, and a certain rigid artistic hierarchy inherited from Eurocentrism is declared obsolete. "Cultural rights" also aim to encourage people to participate in cultural life, regardless of nationality, language or culture.

However, the expression has also been strongly criticized for overemphasizing cultural differences and weakening the idea of a common, universal culture (several of those I interviewed presented this argument). It also negated the singularity or professionalization of

the artist, since anyone can have an equally legitimized practice, with no possibility of evaluation by cultural experts or critics. When misused, "cultural rights" can also legitimize unorthodox practices such as polygamy, female circumcision and the wearing of the burka, all of which have been elevated to the status of cultural rights (arguments similarly echoed by several interviewees). It's then easy to see why "cultural rights" have been embraced at Unesco by most Muslim countries, China and many African countries (Meyer-Bisch, 1999; Gilbert, 2008; Shaheed, 2013).

Is it possible to say here that, on the one hand, the risks of these ideas ("wokism", "cultural rights") have been largely exaggerated as a movement and as a practice; and at the same time to regret that the legitimate questioning of race or gender discrimination is often done at the expense of economic and social discrimination, which are also real. (A number of those I interviewed advanced this final point.)

These debates, already omnipresent in the cultural sector as well as in museums and theaters today, are likely to continue to weigh heavily on the art worlds of the years to come (Mbembe 2000, 2010, 2013, 2016). Many artists from the "Global South" value new artistic practices; others favor the use of non-Western materials.

It's not our intention here to encourage or discourage them, which would be pointless in any case. Rather, it's a question of laying down a few simple principles to make them both more credible and more acceptable to the public (even though I'm well aware that many artists don't care much about their acceptance by the public, and they're probably right about that!)

- In the twentieth century, artists have often been demanding witnesses to the critique of identities in the name of freedom of expression or "dissent". They have criticized fixed identities and have drawn on conflicting identities to encourage dialogue and sometimes multiculturalism (Taylor, 1992), based on multiple identities, as the aforementioned academic Amartya Sen has theorized (Sen, 2006). Some of the excesses of post-colonial discourse, by overemphasizing a singular and exclusive identity, could prove to be at odds with the freedom that artists have long cherished.

- Artists who have often, and rightly, denounced populism should perhaps avoid falling into the trap they denounce. When it comes to post-colonial themes, for example, it's undoubtedly important to appreciate the complexity of the issues at stake, and to avoid the most simplistic answers (which are precisely those of

the populists). So, for example, we have the right, and perhaps the duty, to denounce European colonialism and to welcome the independence movement as amplified, for example, at Bandung in 1955. But this criticism will be all the more credible if it does not evade the considerable mistakes made by certain former colonies since their independence (Mao and Zhou Enlai's China, Sukarno's Indonesia, Castroism in Cuba since 1959, FLN's Algeria since 1962, Chavism in Venezuela since 1998, etc.). A number of my interviewees stressed the importance of this dual imperative.

- In the same way, postcolonialism sometimes gets it wrong when it mixes up all the causes, according to the logic of "intersectionality", which may be legitimate, but not necessarily systematic. Of course, a woman is all the more discriminated against if she is also a lesbian, black and disabled. But it's also possible that she's not discriminated against systematically, or with the same intensity, depending, for example, on her social background. Inequalities rooted in socioeconomic structures continue to play a central role.

- Finally, there's a post-colonial slant that aims for the fundamental destruction of Western societies, as illustrated by activist Françoise Vergès's "Programme de désordre absolu, Décoloniser le musée" (Vergès, 2023). This is a key book, which clearly sets out its radical decolonization program, but it has to be said that this kind of rhetoric has ferociously fed anti-post-colonial discourse, and often plays into the hands of illiberal regimes. This is not to suggest that her writings should be dismissed or that her ideas cannot be fruitfully engaged with.

## 27. THE REACTIONARY ARTIST

And what's true for activists, who are often - wrongly - associated with the left, is also true for reactionaries. Here again, the main criterion is the quality of the work rather than its moral stance. Among France's greatest writers are Céline (a nazi collaborator and anti-Semite) and Michel Houellebecq (a controversial figure aligned with neo-reactionary currents, often associated with anti-Muslim sentiment and gender-based prejudice): they cannot be judged solely on their political ideas.

Today, in Italy or Austria, for example, some reactionary artists are coming to the fore. While each case must be analyzed individually, it is to be feared that their political positioning takes precedence over the quality of their art. This risk could become even more

acute in the years to come, with the rise of illiberal political forces that have the unfortunate habit of choosing "their" artists.

Here again, there's nothing to prevent an artist from being a conservative or a believer, and many great artists have been, for example, religious artists (from Michelangelo to Marc Chagall, via Leonardo da Vinci). And if the opposite is true (Maurizio Cattela or Andres Serrano), the fact of being a believer or not should not become a criterion for assessing the relevance of art; here again, we are in two separate spheres that cannot safely mix, as the criteria for evaluating the spheres are not the same. In my view, all artists should be trained irrespective of their political views or stances on social and societal issues – this remains a conviction I hold firmly. (Several conservative artists I interviewed expressed these arguments, emphasizing their sense of exclusion from the "largely left-wing artistic milieu").

## 28. THE ARTIST AND THE "HORSESHOE"

There are few sectors where the political recompositions underway can be better observed than that of culture. In Italy, for example, Council President Giorgia Meloni's recuperation of the great figures of the left, from Gramsci to Pasolini, was the first sign of the blurring of political and cultural codes. Today, many observers of Italian political life note the rapprochement between the cultural ideas of Ms. Meloni's party and those long defended by the Italian Communist Party: cultural nationalism; rejection of American entertainment; denunciation of elites and cultural places of excellence. These ideas are shared by the Fratelli d'Italia party and the Five Star Movement, i.e., by the far right and the far left, which come together under the so-called "horseshoe" theory. (Several Italian intellectuals and artists kindly shared these examples with me, for which I am thankful.)

This theory proposes an analysis according to which political extremes, although ideologically opposed, converge on certain issues, values and behaviors, such as authoritarianism, anti-liberalism or rejection of European institutions or NATO. Hence the image of a "horseshoe" in which the two extremes are closer together, or at least closer to each other, than they are to the center and the governing parties (Bobbio, 1996; Eco, 1995). In this context, it seems that the denunciation of art and artists is a common ground between extreme forces located

at both ends of the political spectrum. The radical right challenges the elitism of artists, their endogamy and hypocrisy – for example, their willingness to maintain the system as it is, despite their rebellious rhetoric; the extreme left makes the same diagnosis.

In both cases, these antagonistic forces want to recuperate or enlist artists in the name of the Gramscian tactic of cultural hegemony: it is by dominating discourse and culture that these political forces then hope to win elections. This strategy has worked very well for Ms. Méloni, but also for Mr. Orbán in Hungary, MM. Jarosław Kaczyński and Karol Nawrocki in Poland or M. Robert Fico in Slovakia. It explains in some ways Donald Trump's 2024 election.

Such a rhetoric has its limits and contradictions. Rejecting artists on the grounds of their elitism and wanting to enlist them in the name of the battle for hegemony is profoundly contradictory. This paradox explains why most illiberal governments vacillate between being critical of artists on the one hand, and trying to defend an offensive cultural policy agenda and soft power on the other, sometimes with a significant increase in cultural budgets (as during the first Orbán government). Andy Pratt has clearly demonstrated the importance and "challenge" of governance in cultural policies and the creative industries, and illiberal countries confirm, albeit reluctantly, his thesis (Pratt, 2009).

Let's take three examples of this evolution to understand its subtleties: the first is to follow the funding and missions allocated to the Slovak Cultural Institute (Slovenský inštitút), which groups together a dozen cultural institutes responsible for promoting Slovak culture abroad. There are currently ten: in Paris, Moscow, London, Warsaw, Budapest, Prague, Vienna, Berlin, Jerusalem and Rome. This organization, and the country centers attached to it, are responsible for promoting Slovak culture abroad and strengthening cultural relations between Slovakia and other countries. The Slovak Cultural Institutes organize cultural events, exhibitions, concerts, film screenings, conferences and educational activities. They play a key role in disseminating Slovak language and culture internationally, in the same way that the Goethe-Institut supports German culture or the British Council that of the United Kingdom. Since Robert Fico came to power, the Slovak Cultural Institute has been both criticized and defended by the government: elected members of his party have criticized the operation of this cultural network and proposed cutting its budgets; at the same time, the government has proposed opening new

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centers, strengthening its missions and budget, even as it has appointed some of its affiliates to key positions and redirected its action towards the nationalist defense of Slovak culture and language.

The second example is the "Visegrad Group", which brings together Hungary, Slovakia, Poland and the Czech Republic in a fairly informal organization initially intended to defend the specific interests of Central and Eastern Europe within the European Union. On cultural policy, the Visegrad group has in fact been unable to define a line, and disagreements within its members have multiplied. Slovakia and the Czech Republic, for example, have been at loggerheads over language, culture and national identity; similarly, relations between the Poles and Hungarians within the Visegrad group have been strained by the war in Ukraine, or by changes of prime minister (Donald Tusk's victory in Poland changed the group's political center of gravity and Karol Nawrocki's recent win in the Polish presidential election again disturbs this center of gravity.) To date, no consistent cultural policy framework has been formulated or enacted

Third example: the introduction of a "Tourist tax" by the Canton of Sarajevo in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The illiberal opposition (partly pro-Serbian) having refused certain cultural subsidies, the canton decided to create and then increase this tax (it will rise sharply in 2025 from 2 to 3 convertible Marks per night). The aim of this scheme is to better finance tourism in the city of Sarajevo and raise awareness of its cultural and heritage assets. As the city's inhabitants are not affected by this tax and its increase (since, as a matter of principle, they rarely stay in hotels), the majority and its opposition have agreed on this financing. The left and right-wing Bosnians alike unite against the Bosnian Serbs – an unusual strategy that will benefit cultural initiatives without raising the taxes of Sarajevo's residents.

As we can see, cultural policy can undergo unexpected changes, even within illiberal policies or regimes, and it is therefore difficult to predict the direction these policies will take in the years to come.



# CONCLUSION

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR CULTURAL POLICY AND ART UNIVERSITIES?

At the end of this text, it seems difficult to foresee a single scenario to delineate the new contours and territories of art in 2035. Predicting them in a cyberpunk-style for 2049 would have been even more presumptuous, which is why we haven't even ventured that far. So, more modestly, in this article I've confined myself to listing 28 directions, 28 paths that artists might take in the years leading up to 2035, paths that could be "dead ends", or branch off, or intersect with others, heralding different roads, wider or narrower. A Deleuzian "rhizome" approach is to be preferred here!

What does this mean for cultural policy-makers and art school administrators? I would limit myself to three arguments in conclusion:

- Firstly, we need to support artists in both their most specialized and their most generalized dimensions: without specialization, they have neither identity nor originality; without generality, they shut themselves away in their own bubble, outside the art world. On the one hand, they are without voice; on the other, they are without path. This is why we should perhaps not be entirely convinced either by cultural policies or art schools that are built in "silos", or by those that can only do so in terms of transdisciplinarity (the "M+" museum in Hong Kong stands for "museum and more", i.e. a museum that wants to embrace art and design, cinema and architecture, and even fashion or comics). We shouldn't be pitting one against the other, but rather thinking in terms of one with other. The important thing would be to privilege "trajectory" over "knowledge", "adaptation" over "status". There are no rules, but "desiring machines" and "rhizome" are still relevant here.

- Once earlier steps have been taken, it is crucial to subsequently support artists in building their "positive economy" (I borrow this expression from the young poet Arthur Rimbaud in a magnificent letter dated August 28, 1871). It means to prepare them to "hold out" over time before finding their language and form. This can be more or less rapid – there are geniuses, rapid talents – or very long (some artists will never succeed in finding a language) – but it's important to help artists to have the time.

- Finally, we must also encourage innovation,

experimentation and risk-taking (known as "R&D" in start-ups). Failure must be accepted, even if it's always preferable to "Fail Quick". But innovation cannot be imagined or thought of in a vacuum, as it is sometimes thought. Risk-taking often starts from a solid base (Bob Dylan "goes electric" from his success in folk, Miles Davis evolves towards free jazz, funk and fusion from his immense success in jazz).

So it's important to keep these priorities in mind, these three "pillars": a "positive economy"; a "base" for innovation; a specialization and generalization.

Based on these three pillars, the future can be written in a more peaceful way for artists. The future is not unique for art, artists and cultural institutions, but different futures are taking shape (and some we may not even have imagined). This article has attempted to draw up as exhaustive an inventory as possible, in order to outline, on the basis of current trends, however disparate they may be, the developments that lie ahead for 2035.

There is, however, one thing in common between the three transitions underway – the digital, the ecological and the illiberal: the need to protect and defend the singularity of art, whatever the scenarios that lie ahead. I'd therefore like to conclude this article by drawing on the thinker who has nurtured me throughout this study: the philosopher Michael Walzer (Walzer, 1983, 1997, 2000, 2025).

In his major book (Spheres of Justice), Michael Walzer set out to deepen and modernize the great democratic theories of Montesquieu (the separation of powers between the executive, the legislature and the judiciary), Marx (the whole debate on infrastructure and superstructure), Max Weber (his lecture on the scholar and the politician) and Gramsci (the theory of cultural hegemony). Based on these propositions, he formulated his own analysis, which is based on the principle that each "sphere" of social life is distinct and must function autonomously, with its own rules, legitimacies and evaluations, and if possible with its own actors. For example, the political sphere is profoundly unequal, since only elected representatives can act quite freely: it has its own rules and actors, but the important thing is that this sphere does not encroach on other spheres, such as the economy, science, academia or health. Inequality is inevitable within a sphere (for example, in the sphere of culture, a book or film critic cannot merely offer unqualified praise for a work; there is inevitably an asymmetry inherent in the act of criticism) but no actor can have leverage over another sphere, since each

## CONCLUSION

sphere must be independent of the others.

Michael Walzer hardly does this, but I think we can complement his theory by referring to the "artistic sphere" which, like the others, must have its own autonomy, its own peer assessments and its own actors (the artists), without having to submit to the control or influence of other spheres (in particular the political and economic spheres). When executive power encroaches on the artistic sphere, as in China or Cuba, culture is in danger – and with it democracy; similarly, when economic power tends to put culture under its thumb, culture is in danger – and so is democracy (TE, 2024).

If the political sphere interferes with art, it's a problem; if the economic sphere begins to regulate art, it's a problem; conversely, it's also a problem when the artistic sphere unwisely mingles with the activist sphere, forgetting its concern for art – and this opens the door, in reaction, to all kinds of illiberal backlash. (In another form, critic Jed Perl has also taken up this idea in his defense of the arts [Perl, 2022]).

I firmly believe that defending the autonomy of the cultural sphere is essential in the face of the three major transitions on the horizon – digital, ecological and illiberal. In all three cases, artists can forge alliances and work with digital, ecological or political powers (even if they are illiberal), but they must not be subservient to them. They must retain their autonomy and freedom of expression, which is a sine qua non of creativity.

If this balance is respected, it seems possible to hypothesize that artists' room for maneuver ("agency") in the future society will be wide, perhaps even greater than today, but on condition that they preserve or increase their singularity, the originality of their work and the autonomy of their sphere. An autonomous artistic sphere is a sign of a healthy democracy.

Only at that point will artists be able to sustain their work of "keeping the imagination alive" (André Breton). Jacques Rancière expressed this idea differently, stating that art is intended to "produce dissensus, not consensus." These characterizations stand in stark contrast to politics or economics, domains with which artists frequently find themselves in conflict, operating from their own distinct "sphere" (Lang, 2021). As Rimbaud wrote, the poet must "inspect the invisible and hear the unheard of," for he serves as a "multiplier of progress." According to Rimbaud, "Poetry will no longer give rhythm to action; it will be forward," concluding with the exhortation: "The poet says to you: O cowards, be fools!"

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Around one hundred people were interviewed for this article in 2023-2025. These interviews took place in : Belgium ▪ Bosnia ▪ Bulgaria ▪ China ▪ France ▪ Germany ▪ Greece ▪ Hungary ▪ Japan ▪ Poland ▪ Romania ▪ Slovakia ▪ Spain ▪ Switzerland ▪ Vietnam ▪ UK ▪ and the US. (*All interviews were conducted in situ and in person, exclusively in a one-on-one setting and without the use of remote communication technologies*).

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