

ART AND INVESTMENT:

A STUDY ON HOW INVESTMENT IN ART
AFFECTS THE CONTEMPORARY ARTIST
IN SOUTH AFRICA

THESIS

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In 1989, a local museum¹ approached me for the purpose of buying a painting by me that had won a merit award at the Volkskas Atelier exhibition. The buying committee liked the painting and wanted to buy the work for the gallery's permanent collection, but were not prepared to pay the asking price. Despite their belief that the work was good, and worthy of inclusion in their collection, the committee insisted that no more than R4 500 could be paid for the work of an unknown artist. It was implied that it was in my own interests, and in the interests of my career, to be represented in a municipal gallery collection, and that representation, at such an institution, is payment enough for an artist with no established reputation.

This incident raised for me the question of what people perceive themselves to be acquiring when buying a painting: a name or an image? This in turn prompted me to research the topic of this thesis.

As my involvement with the art market increased, it became clear that the financial value attached to an artwork is determined, foremost, by the reputation of the artist, and that the quality of the work is of secondary importance. As Estelle Jacobs of the South African Association of Arts suggests, art appreciation is too subjective for a decision on the price of a work to be taken without knowing who the artist is. For a number of reasons, discussed in subsequent chapters, the art market demands that an artist has a reputation before his or her work is supported by patrons. How artists become recognised and what establishes their reputation is also included.

As soon as a financial value is attached to something, it becomes a commodity. Certainly, monetary exchange for works of art between patrons and artists has been a phenomenon for many centuries. Without this, or a completely revised system, art production could not continue. However, by art serving a materialistic function for people, as often is the modern way where

¹The term museum, when used in this thesis, refers to municipal and national art galleries.

individuals and companies acquire assets to improve and safeguard their financial portfolios, perhaps the aesthetic and spiritual functions of art come to be considered less important.

Here it is necessary to define my personal understanding of what constitutes art. This may help account for my perception of the conflict that arises when art is used and perceived as a commodity, rather than appreciated for its own sake.

There are no exact rules by which to distinguish what is art and what is not art, and art definitions are elusive, and always fall short of explaining the essence of art. Also, the role of art, as well as that of artists, has changed through the ages. According to one example,

It is typical of the new attitude [at the time of the Renaissance] that the public now adopted the artistic approach of the artists themselves, and judged art not from the standpoint of life and religion but from that of art itself. (Hauser, 1951 p 331)

However, I shall limit myself to illustrating some of the present functions of art, as I and some commentators see them. Of course the following are general guidelines, which individuals would apply subjectively when distinguishing what is, and what is not, art.

Visual art is a medium, like literature, used for human expression, a means of imparting knowledge, of edifying. In essence, it is a visual language. As John Berger says,

Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak. (Berger, 1972 p 7)

And Edmund Feldman points out:

Without art - without the use by man of particular materials in particular ways - there would be no way of finding expression for certain states of feeling. Poems or songs cannot have the same meaning as paintings or sculptures about the same subjects; they embody a different set of meanings because they are made of different materials and employ different techniques. (Feldman, 1981 p 15)

In a good artwork, one finds a balance between the artist's imagination and technical skill, conception and execution.

The artist must handle his technical means competently. While technical achievement does not necessarily produce good art-one will not find good art without technical perfection. (E Berman, 1973 p 31)

Perhaps technical proficiency would be a better term to use, rather than "technical perfection".

A good image must possess an overall unity, and a balanced composition, where line and colour are used effectively. Fine works also possess a magic, whereby a certain feeling exudes from them. Also, an artwork of quality must display the essence of its particular subject. A great work of art gives,

expression to a meaningful, emotional concept which has been translated into succinct visual terms. (p 30)

A work of art can express and satisfy a spiritual concern, an aesthetic pleasure, and/or a social function:

art continues to satisfy (1) our individual needs for personal expression, (2) our social needs for display, celebration, and communication, and (3) our physical needs for utilitarian objects and structures. (Feldman, 1981 p 13)

The visual arts can function as languages of praise and celebration, anger and protest, satire and ridicule. In other words, art can influence attitudes, affecting the way people think or feel and, ultimately, the way they act. (p 42)

Although no artwork is absolutely original, as the artist is inspired by, and cannot ignore, what has gone before and what surrounds him or her at present, originality is also important when considering what is art. An artist's personal vision can enable a subject-matter, repeated many times in history, to be original. As well as being a product of the tastes and trends prevailing in society, at this time in history, I perceive art to be a product of individual discernment, and should therefore not be dictated to by the public, unless the public has a sound knowledge of art,

and art history.

Good art is produced by honest artists who do not become complacent about what they create. Artists should work neither from a formula they themselves have developed, nor from traditional formulae, unless they attempt to add something original. The quest should be for better ways to render both objects and concepts, with discerning artists pushing themselves and their subject-matter beyond what already has been achieved.

I further believe that artistic expertise is not determined so much by the subject-matter, but how the subject-matter is rendered, with the proficiency of the marks made by the artist being a sound indicator of that artist's ability.

One axiom - at least in the western view - when defining art is that worthy, genuine art transcends time. The feeling emanating from Michealangelo's *St Peter's Pieta* (c. 1500 a.d.) for example, is as clear and relevant to viewers today as it was 400 years ago. People can still relate to the subject-matter, and the emotion expressed, in this work. Certainly the marble used to make this sculpture, as well as its careful preservation by its Italian custodians, have afforded this work its longevity, but my point is that true art is not fashionable. Should a good artwork be fashionable, then it must transcend the fashion with its other qualities.

As Leslie Sacks has written:

The answer to the question of what constitutes a "good" work of art lies in the differentiation between the temporary and the permanent, what will endure and what not.
(Sacks p 1-2 s.a.)

By which one should understand that those works which are preserved, such as *St Peter's Pieta*, should have enduring spiritual and aesthetic qualities.

A commodity such as a diamond has a fixed set of guidelines to ascertain its quality and value, unlike the more ethereal, intangible qualities of art. Even if diamonds become a type of art form when set in a piece of jewellery, and subjectivity arises when attaching a price to the piece, the

intrinsic financial value can nevertheless still be quantified as the materials used, such as diamonds and gold, will retain their specific market value, irrespective of the artistry of the setting. Fine art's financial value thus differs since the materials used, such as paint and canvas, hardly play a role in establishing the price of the work. Hence people look to who the artist is, to establish the price of the work. My research has shown that artworks, like diamonds, are often treated as liquid currency. However, the intrinsic qualities and functions of art are not commercial, so when art is used as liquid currency, or a fixed asset, it is inevitable that conflict should arise.

The art market can thus be seen as detrimental to artists and art production, especially when art is viewed as an investment.

Great art is the expression of a morally healthy society; in an age of materialism and mechanization the feeling for beauty and the ability to create art of a high quality must wither. (Hauser, 1951 p 819)

The gain in popularity of investment in art is not only because of certain artworks' track record, where the prices of these works rise abreast of, or sometimes above, the rate of inflation. It is also owing to factors in the present era in history. Artists have always relied on patrons for support, but patronage has altered in accordance with history. For my purposes, it will suffice to trace patronage to the beginning of Christianity when artists were supported and employed by the church to produce art for didactic purposes. (Then, as today, artists had to create what patrons wanted.) At the time of the Renaissance, artists began receiving commissions from the aristocracy, monarchs, and heads of state, hence a shift from religious to secular subject-matter at this time. This was when a significant proportion of art started being produced for prestige. Later, the Industrial Revolution gave birth to a new class: the bourgeoisie. This newly moneyed middle class became the patrons of the arts, and this in turn led to the patronage of art by corporate business: trends that still exist. Corporate business resulted in capitalism, of which investment is a product. Hence the move towards art increasingly being bought for investment.

Prior to the Renaissance, patrons of art were more often connoisseurs, thereafter, amateurs too

become consumers of art, giving far more freedom to the artist, as the buyer no longer dictated the commission, from which arose, (p 300-301)

that modern type of consumer who no longer orders what he needs but buys what is offered. (p 301)

Being an amateur, the modern consumer of art does not necessarily demand high standards from artists, and can provide an opportunity for bad art to be produced, and readily accepted by the ignorant patron.

More specifically with regards to the local art market, very little research and art criticism is readily available for the general South African public to read. South Africa has no regularly published local art magazine, for example. If more literature were written, in magazines, books, and exhibition catalogues, about the local art scene it might help to improve the public's understanding of art, lessen its dependence on dealers for this understanding, and possibly increase their participation in the local mainstream art market. So long as this coverage were to remain critical, and avoid being just "hype" prompting the public to accept any rubbish they read to be fact, or any art that might be written about to be worthy art, it would be beneficial to the general public as well as those people involved with the art market.

Undoubtedly, the standard of public taste, affects the standard of a significant amount of the art produced in any given period.

He [Ruskin] was indubitably the first to interpret the decline of art and taste as the sign of a general cultural crisis, and to express the basic, and even today not sufficiently appreciated, principle that the conditions under which men live must first be changed, if their sense of beauty and their comprehension of art are to be awakened. (p 820)

Ruskin attributed the decay of art to the fact that the modern factory, with its mechanical mode of production and division of labour, prevents a genuine relationship between the worker and his work, that is to say, that it crushes out the spiritual element and estranges the producer from the product of his hands. (p 821)

Also in modern times, the artist has become alienated from the buyer of art. An immediate concomitant of the arrival of the collector, and a phenomenon which results from the impersonal relationship between the buyer and the artist and his work, is the fine art trade. (p 301-302)

It must be admitted, however, that this mediation of the fine art trade between production and consumption also leads to the artist becoming estranged from the public. People get used to buying what they find in stock at the art dealer's and begin to regard the work of art as just as impersonal a commodity as any other. (p 469)

If the above is a sound assessment, it can be concluded that art alone cannot change or edify the public at large. Nor, on its own, can good art improve public taste. Nevertheless I believe that the artist who produces work with integrity and insight, helps to improve an aesthetically poor situation, whereas the artist who knowingly produces bad work, pandering to public demand, aggravates the decline of culture.

Throughout this thesis, the term "serious" is used to describe certain types of art. This denotes work that can be called fine art, which one can respect for reasons that have nothing to do with prices, popularity, or degrees of realism or abstraction, though good art can lay claim to these as well. Irrespective of subject-matter the artist in this category should convey his or her work in succinct visual terms, making the work comprehensible for the viewer. Here the image should be a sincere and honest product of the artist's vision or imagination, rather than a preconceived rendering of a specific subject. This can occur even when the artist is working towards a materialistic goal such as a competition, or an exhibition where the works are on sale. Even in these circumstances, the artist who possesses integrity is likely to pursue that which is original. Complacent artists do not usually create "serious" art.

Sometimes works termed "serious" are executed in order to raise issues that invite the viewer to perceive the subjects with new understanding. In this group one often, though not always, finds that an intellectual response from the viewer is prompted. Artists who feel that they are in

some way accountable to humanity, and art, are likely to produce "serious" art, as well as those artists who support the notion of *l'art pour l'art*.

In contrast, terms like "soft", "easy-to-look-at", and "easy-listening" describe images that are not intellectually taxing for the viewer. Here the image is rendered in the attractive way that the public expects to see the subject, with little regard for originality. An "easy-to-look-at" image does not command or retain attention from the viewer as a work of art should, but rather blends into the environment in the same way that wall-paper does, for example. Essentially the purpose of these frequently stylized types of images, is decoration.

To my mind, these images often, though not always, display pretentious design, and superficially skilful techniques. If an artist is insincere or lacks aesthetic insight, he or she can easily fall into the trap of creating these "easy-listening" pieces by regurgitating tired images that appeal to public demand, and repeating that which he or she has discovered to be a lucrative formula.

However one cannot conclude that "serious" art is necessarily good art, nor that "soft" art is automatically bad art. Good and bad art exist in all avenues of art production, although generally speaking, "easy-to-look-at" images are simply pictures, not fine art.

"Popular" is another term used to specify images, which are suited to the taste of the general public. These works display well-liked subjects, and are executed using, mostly realistic, celebrated techniques and styles. Some preferred subjects include, wildlife art, still-life of which flowers are popular, and autumn-coloured landscapes. Often one hears a member of the public utter, "I don't know anything about art, but I know what I like." In order for most people to like a work of art, they need to identify with the subject-matter. Consequently, most "popular" works of art display subjects to which the average person can easily relate, because both subject and technique are, through repetition, comfortingly familiar to the viewer. The artist who works for this market will employ slick techniques, but will seldom render the hackneyed subject-matter in any way that is new from the conceptual point of view.

The term "popular" can describe both "serious" and "soft" artworks. However, since the general public is reluctant to be confronted by the works they choose to admire and live with, more often than not, popular works do fall into the "easy-to-look-at" category.

As Trent Read said:

Your mass market wants soft, easy-listening images.

Research of international trends, patronage and its history, and art criticism, was originally to be included in this thesis, to aid in contextualising the South African art market. However the specified length of research, and the necessity to guard against too many vague facts about a very broad subject has narrowed the field of research for the most part to the experiences of the interviewees, within the context of the local art market.

It became apparent, after conducting interviews with a number of art dealers and artists, the director of a leading auction house, the director of a corporate collection, and the director of culture of the Johannesburg City Council, that these interviewees provided enough material for a number of deductions to be made regarding the fundamental question of how practicing, mainstream artists, and their art, can be affected by the current South African art market, which is increasingly promoting certain types of art as an hard asset.

Since so little research has been completed, and such a small amount of literature about the South African art market published, much of the information in this thesis arises from these interviews.

The interviewees were selected from Johannesburg and Cape Town, which have proved over many years to be the art trading centres in South Africa. All the interviewees participate and work within the local art scene on a full-time basis, and between them, have over a century of experience to share. The following is a list of the interviewees relevant details, which illustrate the reason for their inclusion in this research. All interviews were conducted in 1992. Please note, that when the present tense is used in this thesis, it refers to the period in which this research was written.

Loius Schachat is the owner of Die Kunsamer gallery in Cape Town, which caters for the top end of the local art market. Die Kunsamer is the leading gallery in South Africa for the older (that is not contemporary), top quality South African artworks, representing mostly deceased artists such as Irma Stern, J H Pierneef, Hugo Naude, Cecil Higgs, to name a few. Consequently, this gallery attracts buyers from all over the country. A small number of international collectors buy work from Mr Schachat too. Although Mr Schachat denies that his clients buy the art that he represents for investment purposes, it is known to be, and was cited by other interviewees as, investment art. Mr Schachat only deals in artists who have an established reputation, a policy that has not changed since he opened the gallery in 1971.

Desire Resnick owns the Art Scene gallery in Sea Point, which houses artwork of the opposite end of the spectrum to Die Kunsamer. In this established gallery, Ms Resnick represents essentially unknown, living artists whose work she likes and believes to have merit, which she offers at reasonable prices. Art Scene attracts local Cape Town buyers as well as tourists, but is essentially a gallery catering for the person in the street compared with Die Kunsamer, which only caters for the wealthy.

Estelle Jacobs has been actively involved in the Cape Town art market for a number of years. At the time of the interview she was running the local branch of the South African Association of Arts. Prior to this she had worked in Joe Wolpe's gallery for eight years before opening her own Jacobs and Liknaitsky Gallery, in partnership, in August 1990. This gallery represented serious, contemporary South African art. However, due to insufficient turnover, this gallery closed in December 1991. Ms Jacobs was outspoken about her disillusionment of the commercialization of art in modern times, and also the public's reluctance to support serious art.

Joe Wolpe, the renowned Cape Town dealer, is now retired but still runs an art consultancy from his home in Sea Point. He is known for his efforts to improve public taste by educating people in contemporary art. Over the years he has encountered many people who buy art as an investment with little appreciation for the artwork itself. It was quite evident when interviewing this candid man that his love is good art, not just good money - a trap to which many dealers

are exposed.

Trent Read is one of the family members involved with the running of the well-known, highly successful, Everard Read Gallery in Johannesburg, which was started by his grandfather in 1906. At the time of the interview he had just returned from a five year visit to the United States where he had met many successful American artists. On his return, he was delighted by, and very enthusiastic about, the contemporary art being produced by local artists. On this note, he was preparing to open the Contemporary Everard Read Gallery, which he envisaged as a nurturing place for emergent artists. Here the less conservative work, which was not suitable for the more moderate clientele of the Everard Read Gallery, could be shown.

Ethel Kaster works at Les Art International, a Johannesburg gallery owned by Leslie Sacks. This gallery specialises in graphic prints of international masters, such as Chagall, and Picasso, which are termed investment art. Although Les Art International does not deal in South African art, it nevertheless sells artworks to South Africans who buy art for investment purposes. I therefore decided that the happenings at this gallery should be included in this research.

Stephan Welz is the Director of the auction house Stephan Welz and Co. in Association With Sotheby's. Besides his many years of invaluable experience gathered about art, and the South African public, his views were included in order to highlight the similarities, and the differences experienced, when art is bought and sold at a public auction in contrast to the dealings of privately owned galleries.

Leo Kruger was interviewed because of his involvement with collecting corporate art. He is the Director of The Rembrandt van Rijn Art Foundation, which is one of the best, and oldest, corporate art collections in the country. Not only has he managed this corporate collection, as well as Dr Anton Rupert's personal art collection, for many years, he also has been responsible for co-ordinating the prestigious Cape Town Triennial art competition. The Art Foundation sponsored the first Triennial in 1982, and continued sponsorship for a further three Triennial exhibitions. However The Art Foundation withdrew sponsorship of future Triennial competitions

in 1991.

Christopher Till is the Director of Culture of the Johannesburg City Council, which at the time of the interview was a post newly formed by that Council. Consequently he is up to date with many aspects of the latest happenings in the South African art world and market. Prior to this position he was the Director of the Johannesburg Art Gallery for a number of years, and is therefore experienced in the policies of municipal galleries too.

Beezy Bailey is a young, full-time, South African artist who lives in Cape Town. He paints in oils, and also makes assemblage-type sculptures. Although publically a controversial figure, he is a successful artist who believes in self-promotion, and the marketing of art. This attitude was encouraged by Andy Warhol, whom Beezy Bailey met while living in the United States in the early 1980's. Thereafter he studied fine art in London before returning to South Africa in 1987, when he began his career as a professional artist.

Lisa Brice, having recently graduated from Michaelis Art School at the time of the interview, has been noted as a young, up-and-coming Cape Town artist. She paints in oils, and uses various objects that she attaches to what she terms, construction paintings. Her works were seen by two German dealers who liked the work so much that they had approached Ms Brice to become contracted to them. When I spoke to her this contract was in the process of being finalised. Her other medium is printmaking, which she was teaching on a part-time basis at the Foundation School of Art, and also Stellenbosch University, in order to provide herself with some income.

Mario Sickle is a practicing sculptor whose medium is mainly wood. He does not use commercial galleries to market his work as he prefers to sell directly to the buyer. In this way he differs from most practicing artists who rely on dealers to market and sell their work. In the late 1980's he owned a gallery in Athlone, which promoted mostly liberation-type art, for almost two years. When interviewed he was teaching art at the Community Arts Project in Cape Town.

Kendell Geers is also a controversial, well-known Johannesburg artist who paints, using only

hardware materials. After graduating from Wits University in the late 1980's, he worked as an art critic, mainly for *The Star* newspaper before working for a year in a New York gallery. Returning to South Africa, he worked at the Goodman Gallery until 1992. When interviewed he was preparing to make a living from his art by working full-time as an artist. By 1992, his work was represented in the Wits University Collection, The South African National Gallery, The Johannesburg Art Gallery, and The Pretoria Art Museum.

In summary, the purpose for the selection of these artists includes their various means employed to sell their works. Also each artist is at a different stage of his or her career, and has been exposed to the public buying art for diverse reasons. Furthermore they are all involved in the local art world on a full-time basis, and consequently are in touch with local trends.

This thesis concentrates on the often conflicting opinions of the interviewees, who, I believe, because of their experience and participation in the local art market, accurately reflect enough of the happenings on the South African art scene, for some conclusions to be ascertained.

However, despite the expertise of the interviewees, I must stress that since this research focuses on the views of a limited number of individuals, for the most part no categorical general conclusions can be reached. Such research can provide particular conclusions about specific instances and perceptions. Hopefully these will be of sufficient interest to inspire further, more detailed research.

The following chapters highlight some of trends experienced on the South African art market. To begin with, chapter two briefly examines the local happenings of market in the decade preceeding 1992. In chapter three the observations of the interviewees (excluding artists) are discussed with regard to the local art market in 1992. Then chapter four features the opinions and experiences of those artists interviewed, before some conclusions are expressed in chapter five. This is all viewed with specific reference to how practicing artists can be affected when art is used for investment purposes.

CHAPTER TWO

A RETROSPECTIVE OVERVIEW OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN ART MARKET

In order to contextualise the current South African art market, a recent background of this market, from the early 1980's, until the end of 1992, is to be examined briefly. Thereafter, the perceptions of the interviewees will be considered in more detail than those included in this chapter.

To begin with, fluctuations experienced by the art market, which are out of the control of dealers, buyers, and artists, will be discussed. Following this, fluctuations experienced in the market by factors which fall within the control of those involved with the market, will be examined.

The main factor beyond the control of the people participating in the art market, and yet influencing it, is the general economic climate. Politics has also affected the art market, but this aspect is not discussed in detail in this thesis. Politics alone, can and does affect artists and their art, which has an effect on art market activity. This is discussed briefly in chapter three. Here, the importance of politics pertains to the effect that it has had on the economy. Fundamentally, local apartheid laws prompted the international community to boycott South Africa by imposing trade sanctions, placing much strain on this country's currency.

The fact that art market activity is directly linked with the economy is not a recent phenomenon. Generally speaking, the golden ages of art have often coincided with periods of economic prosperity.

The very fact that painters and sculptors are able to exist at all argues a certain degree of material plenty... (Hauser, -1951 p 40)

It appears that the state of the economy largely dictates the activity of the local art market. As Leo Kruger says,

If there's money, works of art are sold and bought.

And, according to Stephan Welz, politics, as well as recession, play an important role in the market:

There was a very severe dip in the [local] art market in 1977 for instance, after the Soweto riots.

Michael Stevenson, in his thesis, The South African Art Index, finds that art trading and the economic environment are positively linked:

This [South African] market peaked in 1975, fell in 1976 [Soweto riots], and remained weak, as did the economy until 1980. It then prospered but later weakened with the 1984-1987 recession. With the 1988 upturn in the economy, the state of the [art] market improved. (Stevenson, p 17 s.a.)

During the 1980's, there was an immense upsurge of local interest and confidence in South African art, by individuals, companies, and museums. One of the generally accepted reasons for this increased interest is that,

the debased Rand has bred a kind of patriotism-by-necessity even among the well-heeled... National pride in local products has indeed appeared to swell in the wake of the tumbling Rand. (Stafford, 1987 p 711)

According to Stephan Welz, "european art is beyond the reach of most collectors," while Joe Wolpe points out:

Except for tiny graphics, it's hard to find an international work of art selling for under R4 000 [1987 prices]. A lot of money is therefore being diverted towards South African works. (p 711)

A similar trend can be seen with corporate buying policy, which has been revised owing to the recession, and the falling Rand exchange rate. Leo Kruger, director of the Rembrandt Art Foundation stated:

We haven't bought overseas art for four or five years, the main reason being the Rand exchange rate. Our money is worth nothing, and it becomes very expensive purchasing

overseas work. In the past four or five years we have concentrated on purchasing works by younger South African artists. One reason for this is that the older generation of South African artists are very well represented in the collection, and another reason was that we realised that the economy was not all that good and artists were battling, so we concentrated on the younger artist¹.

This, together with an increased number of corporate sponsored competitions, naturally stimulated the local art market in the late 1980's.

More recently, various institutions have formulated, and sponsored new competitions. However, some corporate sponsorship appears to be on the wane in South Africa:

We're sort of in limbo [South African art market], the era of the grand competition has come to a shuddering halt with the last Triennial,

said Christopher Till, who when interviewed was nevertheless working on the possibility of another company taking over the sponsorship of the Triennial, since the Rembrandt Company has withdrawn its sponsorship.

In fact, South Africa has been caught in one of the worst recessions experienced, caused not only by internal trouble. In line with current affairs, it seems that the entire world economy has been caught in a severe recession. Inflation too, is a common problem with modern economies, and in South Africa, inflation has been very high.

Certainly this recession has affected local museums as well as corporations. Purchasing grants have been reduced, and sponsorship has shrunk, which affects the amount of research that can be published, the number of exhibitions that can be held, as well as acquisitions that can be made. The decline of the Rand exchange rate has also forced local museums to concentrate on South African art. The Johannesburg Art Gallery, for example, used to buy a fair amount of contemporary American and British art. Christopher Till explained:

¹Corporations supporting emergent artists was a trend experienced in America in the 1960's.

But the prices [of international works] are such that we have not been able to do that, and the same applies to other museums around the country.

Therefore the emphasis has been to acquire cheaper local artworks.

Observing the general public's purchasing trends, most interviewees have experienced that commercial galleries, and auction houses, have been adversely affected by the recession, because fewer people are buying art now. Estelle Jacobs said:

I know for a fact, the entire art market activity worldwide, not just South Africa, has dropped by half as a result of the world recession. I've spoken to a couple of dealers who have international stock, which is not worth what it was before the recession got stuck in.

As some interviewees such as Leo Kruger stated:

Art is a luxury when financial times are bad.

Public buying support seems to be dwindling even in Johannesburg, which has always been the most active art trading centre in this country. According to Kendell Geers, most galleries there, besides Everard Read, which offers mostly safe, popular pictures, are on the verge of closing down as so few people are buying serious, mainstream art. Hence, in his opinion, there seems to be a lull in the purchasing of certain types of local art at present, in contrast to the overall prolific market activity of the 1980's.

Despite subdued market activity, and the note of general pessimism described above, two new galleries opened in Johannesburg in 1991, three had opened by August 1992, with a further three planned to open before the end of 1992. Cape Town also experienced a mushrooming of galleries in 1991, which Desire Resnick believes aggravated the lull she experienced at the Art Scene, out of the holiday season. However,

if there were no apparent market potential, there would be no incentive to entrepreneurs to take the risk. It can only be assumed therefore that art has come to be regarded as

a favourable field of business in South Africa. (E. Berman, 1973 p 9)

Andrew Brown, writing for the *Cape Times* said:

Although the ailing economy does not favour purchases of lesser artworks - as shown by the closure of several galleries in Cape Town in the past year, including Gallery International and the Market [also Jacobs and Liknaitsky, and Desire Resnick galleries] - recognised pieces such as Pierneefs and Sterns are holding their own. (Brown, 1992 p 1)

Loius Schachat confirmed that Die Kunsamer has not been seriously affected by the recession. In fact, in 1992, Loius Schachat achieved the record price of R400 000 for an Irma Stern work². Although Mr Schachat acknowledged that current economic trends have created a greater supply on the market, he has not been aware of any significant increase in the supply of good quality art due to the recession, which he maintained is because:

The [art] market has not been a speculative, investment market, so you don't have the pressure of selling now.

However, it is perhaps inaccurate to assume that investment is always speculative, or that the moneyed South Africans, who can afford the high-status, expensive works found at Die Kunsamer, are having to realise their assets because of the recession.

Loius Schachat conceded that, "there are less deals being done, less people are buying at the moment," which he believes is,

not only a question of whether they can afford it [an artwork], the psychology at the

² This price may have been decided against a trade-in of another work, which involves the buyer offering the dealer a painting that the buyer already owns, as part of the payment for the new acquisition. Mr Schachat may have paid more for the trade-in than the work's true market value, enabling him to increase the asking price of the said Stern. Alternatively the buyer may have a collection of Irma Stern works and this record price would probably increase the value of such a collection. Nonetheless, this selling price, having been recorded as such, is likely to inflate the value of other works by Irma Stern.

moment is adverse to people buying paintings.

Referring to internal political turmoil, he explained,

that's not conducive to being relaxed and looking at paintings.

Of significance is Loius Schachat's assertion that none of his clients buy art for investment purposes. He believes that, because the clients of Die Kunsamer are wealthy people, they do not need to use art as an investment. However, Ethel Kaster of Les Art International, which deals in international, investment art, pointed out:

People are always looking for alternative investments, they hedge their bets - they don't put everything in one basket. Obviously the kind of people who are going to invest are the haves, and when things are in recession, people look for assets.

So, although, at Les Art International, business has been better it is also holding at this gallery, which caters for the top-end of the market, as does Die Kunsamer.

In 1989 an import duty of forty percent on sculptures, and ten percent on paintings and graphics was introduced by the government, which in some cases encouraged local buyers of international art to turn their attention towards South African art. When the surcharge was first introduced, Ethel Kaster found that there was a decrease in local buying of international art by collectors. However, according to Ms Kaster, there continued to be collectors who, fearing that the declining Rand would become completely worthless, still wished to acquire an international commodity. Ethel Kaster experienced that, once these buyers realised that the surcharge still had to be paid, whether the international artwork was bought at a local gallery, or bought overseas and brought back into the country by themselves, such people continued to buy international art locally. Ethel Kaster explained:

The Rand went from one Rand and eighty cents to the Pound [sterling] to over five Rand to the Pound today [18.6.92] - so if you bought the artwork at four Rand to the Pound, plus the ten percent surcharge, it's still a good investment.

Should the Rand exchange rate improve however, the affected individuals would loose on their

gamble.

Desire Resnick, who, herself, does not deal in what is acknowledged as investment art, such as Stern and Pierneef work, finds:

Many people - I'd say most people today look at art as an investment because of the whole investment in art today - like the Van Goghs - and they [the public] have to start somewhere. It's a big thing today.

Christopher Till and Ethel Kaster agree that because of the very high prices achieved for certain works by artists like Van Gogh, and Picasso, and some contemporary American artists, like Willem de Kooning, the general public has noticed the potential for financial gain when buying and selling art. Ethel Kaster encourages people to buy art for investment reasons, but warns:

I believe that great art is the finest investment. But, I say great art, because, unfortunately many people believe art per se is going to be a great investment, and they'll buy a painting at a local craft fair, and then be very sad when they can't get huge sums of money, or any sum of money [when wanting to resell].

Here it is necessary to understand the term investment, and the reason why it is required. Money used to buy assets in order to either earn interest, or bring profit, or both, is known as an investment. An asset is something of value, such as property, or jewellery, that is owned by a person, which can then be sold to realise the capital, in order to re-invest the money, or to pay debts. Some assets can also be used for surety to qualify for loans from financial institutions. In modern times, inflation has become rife worldwide. It is no longer viable to save money in cash form, because, while inflation continues, cash devaluates. Hence, people look for what are described as hard assets, which rise in value abreast of inflation, in order to safeguard their capital. Some art has been proved to outstrip inflation over the years and has thus gained in popularity as an investment asset.

What Esme Berman acclaimed twenty years ago, is as prevalent today:

The past few years [before 1972] have witnessed a tremendous upsurge of interest in

art-as-investment and, while the tendency has obvious virtues, it also gives rise to disadvantages and dangers which cannot be ignored.

In the first instance, it places greater emphasis upon commercial values than on the presence or absence of aesthetic quality in the works of art concerned. Less-informed viewers are therefore led to judge a work in terms of price; and many are the fingers that may yet get burned as a result.

*It is true, of course, that good works of art are sound investments and that the works of most of South Africa's better-known painters and sculptors have appreciated considerably in market value during recent years. But during the same period the buying-power of money has declined quite markedly. The purchaser is therefore paying more for **all** works, even those devoid of any intrinsic value; but he accepts this in the fond belief that healthy profits lie ahead. Of course, as long as the paintings, graphics, or sculpture continue to decorate his home, he profits only from the pleasure offered by their presence; and if that were all the buyer sought, there would be no harm done. Unfortunately, it is often the works that sell in greatest quantities - the so called "popular art", easily accepted and admired by the general public - which depreciate most markedly with passing time. And the gilt-edged investment with which the gullible collector hoped to finance his retirement may turn out to be worth no more than its gilded frame. (E Berman, 1973 p 9)*

Moving onto the fluctuations and shifts experienced in the local art market that are, to greater or lesser degrees, within the control of the players, Loius Schachat said:

Twenty years ago, art that was [highly] regarded was the overseas art, and there was a tendency to talk down South African art.

Trent Read shares this sentiment:

There's less of the chip-on-the-shoulder attitude which formerly condemned everything local as inferior to the imported counterpart. (Stafford, 1987 p 711)

Besides the apparent influence that economics has had on this shift, dealers' actively promoting South African art must share the credit for this. Loius Schachat, for instance, is certain that Die Kunsamer is one of the most crucial driving forces behind the upsurge in local confidence in South African art:

I believe we have played a meaningful role in promoting the South African art market, and establishing confidence. We don't merely try to persuade the public to have confidence in the market, we do so ourselves, by committing ourselves to buying on quite a big scale³.

In terms of this increased regard for local art, Stephan Welz said:

I think the switch has rather been that institutions such as banks and insurance companies have taken a far greater interest. They were buyers prior to let's say 1970, but it was incidental buying. Since then a large number, my guess is as many as twenty institutions, have appointed a buying committee, or someone, and are forming a serious collection. They have stressed the importance of art to all, and were reaching a community which normal art galleries were not doing.

Undoubtedly, the 1980's witnessed intensified corporate collecting of local art, as well as a proliferation of corporate sponsored competitions, such as the Cape Town Triennial sponsored by the Rembrandt Art Foundation, the IGI Vita Life Award⁴, the Standard Bank National Drawing Competition, Volkscas Atelier Award, Rolfes Impressions Competition, to name a few. These competitions have boosted local awareness of South African art, as well as opportunities available to South African artists. Christopher Till suggested that this surge of corporate support for the visual arts may be because the corporations wish to create a new image which appeals

³ Mr Schachat personally collects particular works of some of the artists in which he deals. Also, Die Kunsamer buys works for cash in order to re-sell them, differing from most other galleries, which carry work on consignment.

⁴ Prior to IGI's sponsorship of this competition, AA Life was the sponsor. More recently First National Bank has become the official sponsor of the Vita Award.

to a different clientele, other than the sports one.

According to Jean le May,

Experts agree that the most notable South African corporate collections are: Altech, Barlow Rand, First National Bank, JCI, Metropolitan Life, Mobil [Engen], the Perm, Premier Group, Rembrandt, Sanlam, Sasol, Standard Bank, Trust Bank, UAL, and Volkskas. [Le May, 1987 p 14]

Each company in South Africa has its own policy regarding its corporate collection, and, because of these differing policies, different companies support different types of art.

The Rembrandt Art Foundation Collection, for example, is a permanent collection of works noted for its quality. Leo Kruger cannot envisage any reason that might cause the artworks to be sold in the future. The Rembrandt Company does not regard its art collection to be an investment scheme. Like many other companies, its policy is for the artistic enrichment of the public. Most of the art collection is hung in the administration offices of the Rembrandt Company, with a very small percentage kept in storage, unlike Sanlam, to cite another company, which keeps most of its collection in storage.

Concerning the policy of corporate collecting,

Engen sees this as being in keeping with the international policy of enhancing the work place. (Brown, 1992 p 1)

Most corporate collectors voice a similar motivation in this regard. Another reason for art acquisitions by some companies is that they see themselves as cultural custodians:

Metropolitan Life bought its collection of Bowler works as an investment and to safeguard them as a cultural asset for the community. (p 1-2)

Like Metropolitan Life, financial investment is admitted by some other companies to be their incentive for collecting too. Colin Bjerre, Group Secretary for Standard Bank has stated:

Apart from its obvious investment value, the Collection was built for people to look at and

enjoy. (Standard Bank Corporate Art Collection, 1990 p 9)

As Andrew Brown wrote:

When art means money, big business is not slow to take note. (Brown, 1992 p 1)

When the Economist Intelligence Unit reported some years ago that returns worldwide on art and antiques outstripped any other form of investment, the hunt was on. Corporate executives here and abroad started haunting salerooms and art exhibitions, one eye on the investment clock and the other on their shareholders. (Le May, 1987 p 14)

In the same article, Jean le May quotes Samuel Pauw, who advises Volkskas Bank on their purchases:

Pauw summed up Volkskas policy as "wanting to present to the banking fraternity the visions of artists in the hope of opening their eyes to other visions": then, coming to earth with a bump, he added: "Being a bank, we will not easily buy something that does not have the potential of investment growth." (p 15)

Just as Leo Kruger admitted, the reasons for corporate collections are not altruistic:

From a corporate point of view, it is a good thing to do.

Jean le May added:

Most companies go for "safe" art, buying nothing that has erotic, religious or political overtones. (p 14)

This trend is understandable if investment is the first priority. Stephan Welz maintains that because public demand essentially determines prices of works, the solid investment types of works, the backbone of collections are the sorts of pictures which have broad public appeal.

Not only have corporations taken note of how art can serve as an investment, it seems that individuals have also become aware of this trend. Apart from the experiences of Christopher Till,

Ethel Kaster, and Desire Resnick, this vogue can be observed by heeding recent auction house activity. According to Stephan Welz:

Dealers are buying less and less at auctions, and the man on the street is buying more and more... People were always cautious of auctions because they felt they could get caught, or that something could go wrong. But, with the guarantees, and the expertise that auction houses are now displaying, they can buy with far greater confidence. In fact, in some instances the auctions houses are offering greater guarantees than what the galleries are offering.

Hence auction houses have gained public popularity. Stephan Welz believes that, if conducted with integrity, there is no fairer method of buying and selling, than at auction. Although, he does concede that,

there are malpractices obviously that do occur.

However, if an individual buys a work from a dealer, the price is set at what the dealer thinks the work is worth, not necessarily what the market thinks it's worth. As Stephan Welz pointed out:

I think one can accept that the price realised on the day of a well publicised, well attended auction, is the value of the day... There is some consolation when buying a picture for R10 000 that there was someone else who was willing to pay R9 800 for it.

What other changes have auction houses experienced in recent years? Stephan Welz, in his dealings with Sotheby's since 1974, has found the market to have changed phenomenally:

If one takes the first sale in 1971, the total [amount] sold was R92 000. Today we've sold several pictures over that figure, and a sale of twenty times that, or even more, is common today. So one has seen that growth.

Mr Welz uses the word growth with caution as, if one considers the depreciation of the Rand, art has "probably just kept up with inflation."

In recent years, Stephan Welz has found inflation to be one of the prime reasons for people selling art at auction: pensioners who retired with a limited amount of capital have found their capital so eroded by inflation that they are having to liquidate assets to complement their income. This occurrence has stimulated a supply of, but not necessarily a demand for, art on the local market.

With auction houses increasingly accommodating the individual buyer, they may be credited partly for the spurring on of public involvement in the local art market too.

Another factor, which may have shifted public interest towards South African art was that, in 1986, forgeries of international graphic works were discovered in this country. According to an article in *Finance Week*, this made South Africans wary about buying international prints, especially lithographs. (Stafford, 1987 p 711) This too may have stimulated the local art market, as these collectors turned their attention to original paintings by recognised local artists.

There are a number of other circumstances, besides those already discussed, which may have prompted the public's interest and awareness of local art. Beezy Bailey for example credits Ricky Burnett, who organised the watershed *BMW Tributaries* exhibition in 1985, for much of this increased regard.

The *Tributaries* exhibition was a turning-point in the local art world because of the type of work that was shown. Prior to this exhibition, art exhibited in South Africa was mostly eurocentric, with artists, supported by commercial galleries and museums, looking essentially towards western European culture for their direction, with little reference to South Africa's peculiar socio-political climate. The work on this *Tributaries* exhibition included objects such as assorted dolls and a windmill, which had not before been regarded as fine art. This type of "ethnic" art, which has a specifically local flavour, came to be known as "transitional" art.

"Transitional art" is often sculpture, though the term has also been applied to pictures. It is usually produced in rural or semi-rural contexts; its materials include indigenous wood, wire, tin, plastics, beads, urban debris, reflectors, animal skins, feathers... Surfaces

may be left "raw" or coloured with enamel paint. Subjects range from prominent political figures, news events, media celebrities, mythic beings of other kinds, sundry spirits - sublime and ridiculous - planes, cars, toys, telephones... Artists from urban areas - black and white - have been referred to as "transitional" as well. (Richards, 1990 p 33)

Much debate has ensued about whether "transitional" is an appropriate term to describe this particular type of art. However, for the sake of simplicity, and to avoid becoming sidetracked, "transitional" will suffice for this thesis.

Three years after the *Tributaries* exhibition, in 1988, the public witnessed, at the Johannesburg Art Gallery, a major exhibition of black art, called *The Neglected Tradition*. Sue Williamson wrote about this show:

Unbelievably, it was the first time ever a large-scale retrospective show of work by black artists had been held in one of the country's leading art galleries. The title itself was an admission of just how pervasive the marginalisation and denial of black art by the white establishment had been. (Williamson, 1989 p 10)

This may have been the largest collection of work by black artists exhibited, however, many black artists had been individually promoted and supported by certain dealers prior to this show.

Nevertheless the South African artistic field expanded to include work that previously had been less promoted in mainstream circles.

Estelle Jacobs supports the view that what is acceptable as art has broadened, and cited the issue of the controversial public debate concerning the *Recent Acquisitions* exhibition held at the South African National Gallery [Jan-Feb, 1992]. As already mentioned, because of the recession, budgets including that of the National Gallery, are small. Since international, as well as top-quality local artworks are too expensive to be acquired, so the trend now is to support emergent artists, and to look at areas such as bead work, that were previously excluded in art collections. In light of this, Estelle Jacobs asserted:

The public finds it hard to accept this.

Estelle Jacobs believes that ten, or maybe even six years prior to 1992, the National Gallery could not have held this show as it would have been unacceptable to the public.

Ms Jacobs explained how times and standards have changed in the South African art world:

The very rigid degrees of professionalism that were associated with the art nation, [ten - twenty years ago] are perhaps not quite so rigid anymore. It's a great deal more flexible now and so perhaps in a way [art and the art market] has become less professional. But, I think it's part of the affirmative action approach - you have to make concessions for lack of education.

Should low quality art become acceptable because of concessions for poor education, or because of low budgets, that could be detrimental to South Africa's art, and her artists. If standards drop, artists could be discouraged from achieving great work because they tend to be inspired by what they see. The existence of high quality art impels artists to uphold that standard, and to produce work of equal quality.

Returning to dealers' views about what circumstances have helped to stimulate the local art market, Desire Resnick believes that the advent of television, and also travel opportunities have boosted the general public's exposure to both international and local art. As Natalie Knight claimed:

More leisure and education give birth to cultural interests. (E Berman, 1973 p 33)

Estelle Jacobs also believes that journalists and critics influence trends in the art market:

I think they have a great deal more power than perhaps they realise.

Written criticism has in its power the means to acquaint a broad section of the public with specific artworks and art movements. Also, the public looks to the written word to help them decide what to think about artworks, fearing that they might appear ignorant about art, should

they not first listen to what the critics have to say. Once the work of an artist receives recognition in the media, the public feels more comfortable and inclined to buy the work of that artist, which of course benefits the artist. However this situation, as has happened in the United States, sometimes inflates prices, and can give a mediocre artist an overblown reputation, should the critic and his or her views not be entirely independent of the artist, or the dealer representing the artist. This circumstance certainly rewards the artist who is being promoted, but whether it truly helps the public's understanding of art or art itself, is debatable, except in the case of critics who retain their independence and integrity. This occurrence has not been covered in detail in this thesis, but further research on this topic might prove to be very interesting and pertinent.

However, in Estelle Jacobs' experience, in newspapers very little coverage is given to the visual arts in comparison with the performing arts, because newspapers receive revenue from film and theatre advertisements, whereas galleries and artists do not advertise to the same extent. Therefore, newspapers claim that it is not in their financial interests to pursue coverage of the visual arts. They also claim that the readership for art is very limited.

Despite there being no art critic in this country of the calibre of, for example, Robert Hughes who is a highly analytical, critical international art critic, the local media has nevertheless aroused some public interest in art. The visual arts have been promoted especially through periodicals, from *Finance Week* through to leisure magazines like *Fair Lady* and *Style*, and to some extent through newspaper reviews and television, as well as comprehensive exhibition catalogues.

Certain sectors of the art world have made conscious moves towards educating the public. In Christopher Till's experience, museums, in approximately the past ten years, have neglected their role of educating the public. Public art education, he said, had been taken over by commercial galleries. But he thinks that museums, whose responsibility it is to educate, have regained their educating role. He stated that,

it's [museums are] moving away from a kind of ivory tower, elitist idea, into being a more community orientated institution... In the past, many of the municipal museums got into the rut of collecting and preserving [art] to a certain degree, but not doing a lot of

research.

Christopher Till believes that research, and the publication of research is very important, in order, *to relate those collections to the circumstances in which they were collected, circumstances in which they were exhibited, making those exhibitions more accessible, relevant, and understandable to sections of the community who traditionally have not been involved with art museums.*

As stated by Mr Till:

The art museums of the country most definitely have an impact of shifting direction, perception, it's inevitable. Commercial galleries do too, with the exhibitions they put on and the clientele that they draw.

There has been a change in museum policy from the past practice of museums displaying and collecting only "masterpieces", to museums becoming places where the art that is now shown is termed "representational". In line with what Estelle Jacobs describes as "affirmative action", museum directors have elected that all types of art produced in South Africa should be represented in local museums. Hence the term "representational" was coined. Needless to say, not all the art produced here, is of a high standard in the traditional sense. Therefore, in museums, one can now view both exceptionally good, as well as exceptionally bad art. This is confusing, and complicates art viewing for the untrained public eye. The public expects to find art that is of a high standard when visiting a museum.

Estelle Jacobs also credits the current art trends to the influence of

people who buy work for public and corporate collections, and perhaps those who sponsor competitions.

When Leo Kruger was asked to comment on how his buying affects the trend, his response was:

I wouldn't say we have an effect on the trend. I think what has happened is that many artists would like to put in their CV that they are represented in a corporate collection.

Nonetheless, Leo Kruger, while travelling South Africa in search of new works, has noted a recent vogue:

Since the Triennial, some dealers have personally bought and kept in their own personal collections works by Siopis, Schultz, Kentridge, Karel Nel, Andries Botha, Phillipa Hobbs, to name some. These are artists they [dealers] believe in. They [dealers] have purchased work from them [artists] not only for their private collections, but to arrange on possibly a yearly, or an ongoing basis, a total exhibition of all these particular artists [Triennial achievers].

These artworks would be offered for sale, with the prospective buyer purchasing directly from the dealer/owner, or alternatively purchasing through galleries, which represent the dealer/owner. This scheme would be conducted throughout the major local centres. One could therefore conclude that the Rembrandt Art Foundation, and hence corporate competitions, do indeed influence trends, since dealers' confidence in certain artists promotes the confidence of private buyers. Consequently those artists work will be more readily supported and acquired.

Returning to Loius Schachat's views, he maintains that the market has not so much changed, as it has grown, but added:

The contemporary art scene has become much more vital.

Mr Schachat considers the centre of the contemporary art scene to be Johannesburg, not Cape Town. He also conceded:

The current wisdom in the art establishment circles seems to be concentrated on African art. That is definitely an emergence of a new field of very active interest, country-wide.

So indeed, with regard to issues discussed, local art in South Africa has received increased attention from museums, corporations, and the public recently. However, is this increased interest on the part of corporations and the general public because they have grown to appreciate the spiritual and aesthetic value of art, or has the public's awareness, and that of corporations, grown in response to the potential financial gain when buying and selling works of art?

As Esme Berman wrote in 1972, which was also an art boom time:

Greater art consciousness is not necessarily accompanied by greater aesthetic insight; nor do increased sales and higher prices automatically imply a rise in the quality of the art produced. (E Berman, 1973 p 9)

CHAPTER THREE

SOME OBSERVATIONS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN ART MARKET 1992

Having outlined recent local art market activity, some perceptions apropos Mr Welz, Mr Till, and Mr Kruger, as well as dealers who were interviewed will be considered in more detail.

As the dealers who were interviewed for the purposes of this research deal in diverse types of art, catering for different sections of the market, so the services they render to the public and also to artists, vary. A sentiment commonly expressed by dealers is that, in order for their galleries' to exist, these must be successful as businesses. In Estelle Jacobs' experience, commercial galleries struggle to sell what she terms serious art. From this, one can conclude that these gallery owners deem it necessary to be interested and inspired by both art and business, not forgetting that a business is an organisation which renders goods and services for profit.

Loius Schachat, being a collector himself, essentially provides a confidential service for collectors countrywide, not just in Cape Town. As Mr Schachat stated:

In our field we are the leading gallery. This [Die Kunsamer] is the only place in South Africa where you can get a range of top names at any time. Where we also differ [from other galleries], is essentially we carry our own stock, whereas most galleries work on consignment.

He continued to explain his relationship with his clients:

We have found over a period of twenty years, not one client has complained about value or price movement, or anything. The values [of the artworks] have remained on a consistently rising level. No-one has ever lost on anything they have bought from us, we make that a policy. How much profit they make is not part of our responsibility, but [we] take it as part of a moral code that no-one must loose anything, and that obviously also contributes to the sense of confidence.

Trent Read describes how the Everard Read Gallery serves the public:

We tend to make friends with our clients; our clients are friends. It's very much a business that runs on trust. Sometimes when I've developed a relationship [with a client] I'll say, "Look trust me on this thing - bring it [the artwork] back after a while if you haven't grown into it." I take a swing, and usually I've judged them [the client] right. That's the essential role of what I'm about, and what we're here for - to do some educating.

Education may be the good intention of the Reads. However a different picture emerges if one considers an incident reported¹ to have occurred at the Everard Read Gallery, when one of the Read's was overheard advising a client to buy a particular work. According to Mr Read this particular artist was good, but his work was underpriced and in Mr Read's informed opinion, the value of the artist's work was to increase. Apparently no attempt was made to discuss the artistic merit of the work. Mr Read was, it seems, encouraging the client to take advantage and buy the work before the prices increased. From this one can conclude that Mr Read's concern, in this instance, was on money appreciation rather than art appreciation. Perhaps money interests and art interests are not mutually exclusive.

Even so, it seems that most gallery owners develop long term relationships, based on trust, with regular clients.

Desire Resnick, who owns the Art Scene in Seapoint, also owned the Desire Resnick Gallery on the foreshore in Cape Town, which she opened specifically to display large paintings, as the Art Scene is a fairly small gallery. Although large paintings were sold at the Desire Resnick Gallery, Ms Resnick found running two businesses impractical, as clients wanted her personal service in both galleries. Hence, Ms Resnick decided to close her foreshore gallery, as the Art Scene was the more established of the two galleries, and she now spends all her time at the Art Scene:

You see I've created a very personal business, and people want to see me here [Art

¹ By my friend Ian Gordon

Scene]. I think every gallery has a different stamp on it... I would imagine that every gallery owner has their influence throughout their gallery. I'm sure that there are some clever gallery owners who have got, maybe not even their taste, just things [artworks] that sell. I know my influence is very much in the gallery [Art Scene]. I like over the top, and I serve a certain need for certain people.

However, the question of whether clients can always trust a dealer's motivation for wanting to sell an artwork remains. Many years ago Joe Wolpe said:

Because of ignorance and lack of good taste among the wealthier sections of the community, art dealing lends itself to abuse and offers tempting possibilities to an over-ambitious dealer who can exploit the snobbishness and ignorance of clients, and who, if he is capable of getting away with it, can rob the artist as well. (E Berman, 1973 p 52)

Mr Wolpe's contention still holds some importance today, as some interviewees maintain that moneyed South Africans lack taste.

Christopher Till has views and impressions on dealers exploiting the ignorance of clients, although no names were mentioned:

Sure there is that [manipulation/exploitation], but I don't think they [dealers] survive for too long, as people are looking for an honest dealer, someone they feel comfortable with, where the advice is proven. But there are the sharks and charlatans around in the art world as with everything else.

On the issue of some dealers manipulating prices of works on the art market, Leslie Sacks wrote:

When dealing with an average or middle-range artist, promoted solely by a particular gallery, which has a monopoly over the artist's work, then the concept of price stabilization and development is clearly linked with the motivation and controlling manipulations of that particular gallery. (Sacks, p 2 s.a.)

In response to this view, Ethel Kaster was asked to comment on the possibility of manipulation of the art market by auction houses too², since the annual sales figures or indexes, released by auction houses, only account for actual transactions, while unsold artworks are omitted from these records. (*Personal Wealth*, 1991 p 38) Also, record-price sales become highly publicised events.

Ms Kaster's initial response was:

I don't think so, because how can you manipulate [prices] at an auction?

Then, when the malpractice of bidding off the wall above the reserve price was highlighted, she replied:

I think you are then saying that your bidders are totally out of touch with what is happening... I don't really believe that the big auction houses place people to push the prices up. You know in every single field I think there are areas of dishonesty and inflation, but on the whole, I think the people buying the art decide or control the market.

This last point of Ms Kaster's is debatable, since art market direction is influenced and set by various factors, not only by the buying trends of private individuals and dealers.

Encouraging the public to buy art is of course a concern of the gallery owner, and various means are employed to promote art sales. Once the client is physically in the gallery, each dealer has his or her own technique to encourage the client to buy work, but to ensure that the public does visit the gallery, most dealers have constantly to advertise their changing exhibitions in media publications in order to keep the public interested and informed.

Most interviewees, and not just gallery owners, agree that art has to be advertised and promoted

² Most of the artworks at Les Art International are acquired at international auctions. Like Die Kunsamer this gallery does not carry work on consignment - it buys artwork for cash.

to a certain extent in order for it to be noticed by the public. Desire Resnick asserted:

I think that most things that are successful are to the fore a little bit; they must be to a certain degree - it reminds people that you are there.

Ms Resnick advertises in Captour brochures, in magazines, and also local Cape Town papers such as *Atlantic Sun*, *Cape Times*, *The Argus*, and *Die Burger*. Besides paid advertising, Ms Resnick finds that the public decidedly heeds written reviews:

Art critics come in sometimes to do crits and that obviously advertises us well.

Sometimes gallery owners/directors arrange for exhibitions to be televised. This form of advertising certainly acquaints a broad sector of the public with art happenings. Mailing lists are also an important means of involving the public in changing exhibitions. Each gallery builds up a list of potential buyers, as well as individuals and companies interested in art, to whom the gallery sends mostly invitations to exhibition openings. Anyone wishing to keep abreast of a gallery's activities can request to be added to the gallery's mailing list. This is an effective avenue of advertising for galleries.

Some well-known galleries such as Die Kunsamer do not need to advertise to the same extent as lesser-known galleries, as they rely on their reputation to draw clients. Clients exposing their acquisitions to friends is a further successful way of spreading the word.

In terms of promotion, Estelle Jacobs believes that, "marketing is very important with regards to everything." However Ms Jacobs made plain her reservation:

I think that...art has been turned into a commodity and made commercial and I don't think that [commercialism] has anything to do with art... I don't think it [art] should be walked around the marketplace in the same way as tomatoes and oranges and shoes - but unfortunately it [promotion] seems to work.

Evidently art must be promoted and advertised in order to hold the attention of the buying public, while at the same time not being treated as an ordinary commodity. This being the case, how are

the prices of artworks determined by dealers, and what is the influence of the art market on such prices?

Loius Schachat explained how, when he first opened Die Kunsamer, he decided on the financial value of an artwork:

We'd follow the principal of assessing [the price] on our own judgement, according to the merit of the work... We adopted the principal of assessing prices at a commensurate value level³. At that time [early 1970's] it [this form of pricing] was a bit of a novelty for South Africa, certainly Cape Town, to see Sterns and Innes at the sort of prices we were asking in those days, as we thought they were worth it. But over the years, our policy hasn't changed.

The most fundamental element, determining the financial value of an artwork, from the market's viewpoint, not necessarily how the artist values his/her work, is supply and demand. Supply is fixed by the artist: the amount of work produced by the artist. Demand on the other hand is created by the desire of the public for works it wishes to acquire.⁴

Naturally prices rise on a buyer's market⁵. (E Berman, 1973 p 33) Therefore a fundamental concern for dealers is to retain the buyer's interest, hence the need for the marketing and

³ That is, pricing the work according to the intrinsic merit of the work. In other words, Mr Schachat attaches a price to an artwork that he believes to be commensurate with the work's artistic merit.

⁴ Two dictionary definitions of supply and demand: 1) The amount of goods available and the amount wanted by consumers, the relationship between which is regarded as controlling prices. (Oxford Advanced Learner's p 1292) 2) A phrase used to denote the relations between consumption and production: if the demand exceeds the supply, the price rises; if the supply exceeds the demand, the price falls. (The Concise English Dictionary p 297).

⁵ More buyers increase demand, which in turn increases prices. This is not to be confused with the economic term "buyers' market", which denotes that prices are down in a certain market, usually because of inactivity, or because there are more sellers than buyers, placing the buyer in a favourable position, whereby he can name his price.

promotion of art.

So as long as the demand for artworks outstrips the supply, be it any type of art, or specific art by selected artists, so the financial value of the artworks will be maintained or will increase. Therefore an artwork with intrinsic artistic value will not fetch a high price if it does not appeal to popular demand. Hence, one can conclude that an artwork with a large price tag is not necessarily a great artwork, and also that an artwork with a small price tag is not necessarily an unimportant artwork.

Estelle Vojaties-Joubert, curator of the Sanlam art collection, makes no bones about how the financial value of an artwork can be decided:

The value of a painting at any time often depends more on the popularity of the painter and marketing ability of the art dealer than on the intrinsic art value of the work. (Vojaties-Joubert c.1991)

In Natalie Knight's opinion:

The majority of people buy art because they like it. Yet, in a game of word association, one will often find the word "art" followed by the word "investment". This has a lot to do with the materialistic age in which we live. Those who sell art have played up the historical fact that good art has always gone up in value. It is an excellent selling factor to quote the example of a customer who bought an Irma Stern while the latter was an unknown artist. But can art be assessed in terms of money? A great work of art leaves an inestimable legacy to mankind but, because art can be purchased, its negotiable value must be rendered in Rands and Cents. Whether this is R20 or R20 000 is dependent upon the supply and demand. It is measured by the value which man places upon what the artist has to offer and varies with the prevailing canons of taste. The values of society change and this is where the danger arises. An artist may command high prices because his work is popular at the time but in twenty years he may be passe. (E Berman, 1973 p 25-26)

The factors of supply and demand affect the art market as much they do any other field of commercial transaction. Thus it is that works of art tend to rise in price following the artist's death. (p 11) Ethel Kaster sees this issue thus:

For me art is the one thing above everything else [other hard assets]; it is unique. Jewellery isn't unique, the design might be, but if they mined all the gold and silver and diamonds, there would be plenty of jewellery, it is man controlled. Art is artist controlled; when the artist dies, that is it. Picasso may have been the most prolific artist, but it [Picasso's art production] is limited; there is no more Picasso.

Essentially, prices are largely decided by what people are prepared to pay for artworks. As Ms Berman noted, the market-value of a work of art is not reflected in the prices asked, but in the sums that buyers are prepared to pay. (p 12) And according to Stephan Welz, general public appeal determines prices.

Auction houses have been accused of interfering with prices achieved at auction. Sotheby's internationally has been charged with creating instability, and inflating prices on the marketplace, by offering loans to buyers and guarantees to sellers. Stephan Welz however believes that this in fact creates stability:

You are taking the pressure off the seller to a certain extent, and you are placing the buyer in an easier position to buy. Why we look after the buyer also is that in many instances a dealer might be acting as an agent for a client, and we know from experience that his client is not going to pay him within 30 or 60 days, and we would then accommodate him [the dealer] for that period. The only instances when we've advanced loans is where the person is a seller, and the reason we loan is to beat the gap between the urgency of the seller having some money, and when our next suitable auction will take place.

It appears, therefore, that Sotheby's locally has a different policy from Sotheby's internationally, which is known to have given guarantees to sellers, and to have advanced loans to buyers as with Alan Bond's purchase of Van Gogh's *Irises*⁶. (Hughes, 1989 p 50)

Stephan Welz added:

We are I concede, protecting the market, in the sense that from becoming a very pressed, forced seller, we're easing the situation to make it slightly more comfortable for the seller. But we are certainly not forcing our prices in any sense.

When asked how the buyer can be sure that malpractices such as chandelier bidding, also known as bidding off the wall, above the reserve price, do not occur, Mr Welz replied:

The buyer must decide, there must be people who do practices beyond our practices. We're giving the buyer an estimate, and he has to make up his mind what he thinks it's [the artwork] worth⁷.

Also noted by Esme Berman is that, as an artist acquires recognition and reputation, so his work naturally rises in price. (E Berman, 1973 p 6) This phenomenon is probably because only once an artist is known and recognised by the public, will the public want to buy the artist's work. However one cannot conclude that the work of an unknown artist possesses no merit, nor that a particular work of an artist with an established reputation is a great artwork merely because the

⁶ This case certainly created instability on the international art market as Mr Bond, incurring financial loss, failed to repay Sotheby's their loan for two consecutive years, and the auction house was not prepared to put the work up for auction so soon after the all-time record of \$53m had been achieved, fearing that the painting would fail to achieve a price anywhere near its so recent record. *Irises* was eventually sold to an American museum for a highly-regarded, undisclosed price.

⁷ Individuals can bid at auction, with no intention of buying, in order to push up the price of the painting, as the individual owns another painting by the same artist. If the artist achieves a record price at auction, the individual's own painting will probably increase in value. Internationally, auction houses themselves, have been known to indulge in this practise, bidding below and also above the reserve price. A chandelier bid above the reserve violates present rules. (Hughes, 1989 p 50)

artist has a good reputation.

Christopher Till's response on the question of prices being accorded to the reputation of the artist was:

Well that's just business, nothing else.

Mr Till acknowledges without hesitation that this circumstance encourages the general public to be more concerned with the name and the lifestyle of the artist, than with the image.

As Ms Berman stated, there is no such thing as an absolute material value for any work of art. Many factors help to determine what the individual buyer is prepared to pay. Each of the three parties directly concerned in the art-market - artist, dealer, and collector--exerts an independent influence upon the scene. (p 13)

Having already partly reviewed the dealer's influence on the market, we should now consider public influence, but in terms of the dealer's experience of clients' current sentiment and taste, and some of the reasons why clients buy art.

Loius Schachat finds people need and want virtually no advice from him when buying an artwork. However, Mr Schachat's clients know that they will only be confronted with good art in Die Kunsamer. Clients are confident because there is little chance that their judgement or taste will be questioned, that an expert will come along and dismiss the piece as a bad work, which can easily happen in some galleries where unknown artists are represented. When confronted with an unknown artist's work, it appears that the customer wants more background on the artist and assurance from the dealer. This tendency is confirmed by Estelle Jacobs, Desire Resnick, and Ethel Kaster.

Estelle Jacobs has become aware that generally people are insecure about committing themselves to the work of an unknown artist. In her experience people are prepared to like the work of an unknown artist, but are not prepared to buy the work unless it is very cheap (below about R200),

or unless the buyer thinks there is an investment potential. She finds that the general public is interested in background on the artist, in which collections the artist is represented, and is more convinced with regards to the merit of the artist's work by a thick CV than by the actual artwork. Ms Jacobs attributes this attitude to the fact that the general public is not art literate:

They don't know how to read a lot of art.

In Stephan Welz's experience:

Everyone wants the confirmation that what they are buying is good [art]; confirmation of their feelings. Generally people don't [openly] take advice when it comes to art for two reasons, a) we're all brought up in a society where one is expected to have good taste; you don't display your ignorance - so if people are seeking advice, they do it very subtly, and b) there are so many personal factors which influence the buying of art. I think a lot [of art buying] is to do with buying dreams... Obviously a lot of people want the consolation that what they are buying, if they are buying something of value, will remain of value, which is like looking into a crystal ball. But I think one can reasonably accept that if something has had a good track record for a long time, then it should keep that good track record.

Estelle Jacobs has found that only a collector or someone who knows something about art, will buy the work of an unknown artist.

Trent Read shares a similar experience:

With the first show of an artist, usually only people really confident in their own taste will buy. The second show is the one that goes well [in terms of sales]: people will say oh yes, I remember that artist, now I've got used to them. At first people are concerned, naturally.

If a buyer likes a particular artwork and is to enjoy its presence in his or her home should he or she buy that work, why would that buyer be concerned?

Desire Resnick cited the example of one of her clients lacking in confidence in his own taste. This client is a professional man, a medical doctor, who regularly visits the Art Scene as he admits that he thoroughly enjoys the work exhibited at Ms Resnick's gallery. However he never buys anything from the Art Scene, which represents the up-and-coming artist, as he concedes that he can only buy a name. Ms Resnick commented:

He doesn't have the confidence to have the work of an unknown artist hanging in his home; so he doesn't trust his own judgement. He obviously wants an investment, he makes no bones about that.

Desire Resnick finds that she spends much time explaining artworks to her customers:

They never need to like it, but they need to appreciate and understand it.

Ms Resnick even experiences that,

Some people can't buy a painting because the frame is gold and all the other frames in their home are silver.

Stephan Welz also experiences that the general public lacks an understanding of taste:

People are still inclined to buy pictures that will fit in and match the curtains. There is still very much that feeling, unfortunately, that you only buy nudes to hang in the bedroom.

Trent Read explained this circumstance thus:

A lot of people in this country have made their money very quickly and...their money has outstripped their taste... [But] be aware of generalisations - there are a lot of people with good taste out there.

Estelle Jacobs has also encountered that people with taste often cannot afford art, and,
you very often find those people with the money, have very little taste.

This statement echoes the sentiment of Joe Wolpe, expressed earlier in this chapter. This situation

could adversely affect the quality of art as it is said that public demand does control the market to some extent. If there exists a demand for tasteless art, then no doubt tasteless art will be produced.

For what reasons, then, do people buy art? As the various gallery owners carry different types of art, they experience varying reasons for buying on the part of their clients. Amongst such reasons given by gallery owners are the following: people buy art because they like and enjoy art; some people can't live without art; clients wish to decorate their homes; some people use art as a status symbol; and some people buy art as an investment. Obviously, these are broad categories, into which not all art collectors belong. Also, most buyers frequently have more than one reason for purchasing art.

However, investment buying is the concern of this thesis. While conducting interviews, it became clear that investment in art can be a sensitive issue, especially with those involved with and dealing in the types of artworks generally viewed as investments. One reason for this could be that when art is viewed as an investment, it becomes a commodity. Since these dealers, being involved with this section of the market, could be aligned with promoting and perpetuating art as an article of commerce, it is possible that they would therefore be unwilling to admit that clients buy art as an investment.

Of course buyers of artworks have mixed motives, but one of these certainly is an investment consideration, even if the work is not necessarily subjected to speculative buying and selling.

South African art which, locally, is generally regarded as an investment is the art produced by the older generation of South African artists who have established reputations. Comprising mostly deceased artists, these names include JH Pierneef, Irma Stern, Hugo Naude, Maggie Laubser, Alexis Preller, Gregoire Boonzaier, to name just a few. It must be noted that this older master work is not regarded as an international investment, as it does not have a marketable value overseas. In other words, at this point in time there is little demand for these local artists' work on the international market, so that, on the international market, an owner of one of these types

of works may struggle to realise a competitive price for their artwork.

Loius Schachat who is the leading dealer of these established artists, regards this type of art as a hard asset, but denies that his clients buy the art which he represents for investment reasons. People who buy art are those who are able to afford it and who don't need it for investment. Further, Mr Schachat insists that people do not buy the art he represents for investment purposes as, some of them [clients] are the wealthiest men in the country, so the bit of money they are going to spend here, may to the man in the street seem substantial, but in the context of their general investment portfolio, it [the money spent at Die Kunsamer] is pittance.

Of course one cannot assume that wealthy people are concerned with investment in art, but, neither can one assume that wealthy people are not concerned with investment in art. Since investment in this current age is what people look towards to safeguard their assets in order to keep abreast of inflation, it is inevitable that moneyed people will invest. After all, art has come to be known as a favourable field of investment. The sum spent by the buyer may not be substantial, relatively, but that does not preclude the possibility of the artwork being perceived as an investment.

One can also not preclude the possibility that clients may not take the dealer into their confidence if they have motives other than the desire to buy artworks for their own sakes. This can only be determined if the history of such works is followed through to see whether there is a turnover or not. As long as wealthy owners hang on to their purchases, nothing can be said except that they like possessing these objects which happen to be valuable.

I raised the point with Loius Schachat that if people are parting with large amounts of money, surely the buyer must feel secure that the work is a valuable asset - that buying expensive South African art is a wise thing to do with their money? His response was:

But that is something else [not investment]. They want to have the confidence that the value will hold.

He then concluded the interview with,

the investment aspect of South African art is exaggerated in the minds of the outside public. Obviously if someone pays ten million dollars for a painting, he has a regard to the investment aspect - it's big business.

It should be noted here that a couple of million dollars is the average price paid in America at present for top American artworks, compared with an average of about one hundred thousand Rand for a top South African work. And, according to Stephan Welz, South African artworks have not reached the heady heights of major international items, but they have risen in value dramatically over the last twenty years. He says that the hundred thousand Rand bid at a South African auction is comparable to the ten million dollar offerings at great international sales. (Welz, 1989 p 31)

Yet Ethel Kaster finds that:

When people are spending many thousands of rands, which this type of art costs, they want to know that it is a good investment.

Of the work exhibited at Les Art International in June 1992, prices ranged from 6 500 to 12 750 British Pounds Sterling, which, when converted into Rands, does not exceed the price range offered at Die Kunsamer.

According to Loius Schachat, investors buy international art, not South African art, for investment, because, overseas, international art has a negotiable value, which Mr Schachat says would certainly not apply to South African art on the overseas market. This is another reason Mr Schachat uses for asserting that his clients do not buy art from him as an investment.

However, the knowledge that the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) stocks and shares have no market value anywhere but in South Africa, does not stop institutions and the general public from investing in the JSE. It is a means of investment available and accessible to South Africans. There is no reason why this sentiment should not apply to the art market.

Ethel Kaster who also pointed out that older South African master work is not a world investment at this present time, added that,

locally it is an investment without a doubt. I know people do invest in South African art.

Here it should be noted that the art of a certain country, not holding its value in another country seems to be an international phenomenon (in the case of art made this century. This does not apply to old masters whose values have stabilised). In fact most of the international art which is taken to Stephan Welz and Co. for auction, is sent overseas, where it "will sell best."

According to Bonnie Burnham, a contemporary American painting may be worth three times as much in the United States as it would be in Europe; and a well known European artist may draw little interest in America. (Burnham, 1975 p 222) This however does not stop the British buying British art nor Americans buying American art, of a type which is commonly portrayed as an investment. So why should South Africans not have faith in the local market? A top South African artwork may not be marketable internationally at this stage, but over many years, South African art prices have been steadily rising in South Africa.

In fact, according to Stephan Welz, certain areas of the South African art market have performed better than the types of international art mostly bought by South Africans. The reason is that, for the prices paid for the very top South African art, one can only acquire mediocre or in fact inferior international works, which have been the worst performers on the art market worldwide. For this reason, Mr Welz thinks that those South Africans who bought international art as an investment, an international currency, wishing to secure their devaluating Rands in hard assets, have done worse from an investment point of view than those who bought the best South African art. There may be a number of South Africans buying international art, but how many of these buyers are able to afford a major international artwork?

Also according to Estelle Jacobs, the public does not regard South African art an investment as it has no market value overseas. Nonetheless, she does experience that when people view a contemporary South African artwork, they,

often want to know what the investment potential of the work is like - whether the value will rise, and will they be able to sell it in the future... I think certain South African art is perceived as a so called investment or as hard assets, and those are the big names like Pierneef, Stern, Maggie Laubser - people [artists] that are dead now. Because there is more of a demand than a supply, they are perceived as an investment. In South Africa there is a market for investment art and there are galleries that do specialize in that sort of work.

Stephan Welz said that regarding art as an investment is a marvellous justification for the public to spend their money on art, but he does not think that investment is the motivating factor when people buy art. However, it is difficult to believe that some people are not solely motivated to buy art for investment, when hearing about an individual who took an Irma Stern painting to Sotheby's to be sold. A person working at Sotheby's noticed that this individual was handling his painting particularly roughly, so the Sotheby's employee interjected that the painting was valuable and should be handled with care as condition affects value. The individual's response was that he was not concerned as the painting was insured for more than it was worth anyway!

According to Mr Welz, the type of painting which is a solid investment is to a large extent an image which is popular, an image which the general public finds attractive and can relate to, not protest art, which Mr Welz said is seasonal. However, he believes that there is a reasonable balance at the moment as there are enough serious buyers, museums and institutions, buying serious, not only popular art.

Perhaps corporate collections have improved since 1987, when Stephan Welz apparently described most corporate collections as lousy. (Le May, 1987 p 14)

Since the art described by Mr Welz as popular and as having solid, or safe, investment potential forms the cornerstone of investment art, for the most part, it becomes apparent that the increase in public involvement in buying art has not been because there is an increase in public understanding and regard for the inherent value of art, but rather that possibly there has been an

increased interest on the part of the public in the investment potential of art. As people require safe investments, it is therefore not unlikely that they might demand safe ideas, and safe pictures from artists.

Besides this phenomenon described above, Stephan Welz has also noted that the public tends to follow the example or trend set by public figures:

Mr Oppenheimer buys Thomas Baines, so there must be something to Thomas Baines. If it's good enough for Mr Oppenheimer, it must be good enough for me.

Leo Kruger, who is not a dealer, thinks that there are two categories of people who buy art:

There are some who buy art particularly as an investment. Obviously there are people who invest in art, I'm quite sure about that. Then the other person buys a work, whoever the artist may be because it [the artwork] appeals to him [the buyer].

Christopher Till holds the following views on why people buy art:

There are those who need to fill the walls, in the same way as they buy a carpet: it's aesthetically important for people to want to attach something to the wall because it is part of the furnishing. Then there are those who are genuinely interested in acquiring a collection of objects or artworks which they themselves respond to very positively: that is a collection urge. There are those who follow the work of an artist or a group of artists and are genuinely involved in being part of an intellectual process in acquiring some of that creativity for themselves. And there are those who speculate, and use art as a commodity.

CHAPTER FOUR

ARTISTS IN THE MARKETPLACE

Each artist interviewed has his or her own motive for producing art, but they appear to share a common perception of what should, and what should not, be termed fine art. These artists believe that the easy-to-look-at, pretty picture, often preferred by the public, is not necessarily art. They believe that the image should challenge the viewer to some extent. Kendell Geers takes this even further, maintaining that the artist should be subversive, challenging art itself.

Artists who produce these types of easy-listening works usually discover a subject-matter that appeals to many, such as sea-scape, landscape, or still life. They "perfect" their subject matter and composition, and employ clever techniques, designed to seduce the uninformed public, and then produce numerous "original" paintings that are virtually identical. These subjects appeal to the public because they are thoroughly familiar. The way these subjects are represented for popular consumption distinguishes them from representations of the same subjects by truly original artists. It is not the genre, but the hackneyed version, which is at fault. These stereotyped images are composed in ways to attract the viewer who prefers well-worn images, such as placing the subject in a familiar environment. Then, suave techniques, and the preference for a palette designed to appeal to sentimental values, or to blend into pretty environments, are employed.

On the issue of dealers and the public repeatedly wanting such soft images from artists, Beezy Bailey expressed his view:

People [artist, dealer, and public] are basically picking up where Tretchikoff left off, in terms of imagery. I think it's got a certain kitsch value, whatever it may be, I can't accept it [popular pictures] to be what I consider to be contemporary art or fine art. To me it is glorified street art, like the wildlife kind of sturdy paintings that all look the same in their huge gold frames.

Kendell Geers also cited wildlife pictures as an example of what is not art, because, he said, in

wildlife images, there is no consciousness [intellectual faculty], no parody, no critical edge.

All of the artists interviewed more or less profess to reject the criteria of the popular market. This market, and, of course, the market in established master works, is therefore not their concern. However, this has not excluded them entirely from market success, as becomes apparent on closer inspection of their careers.

When considering the work of the artists interviewed and their chosen subject-matter, it is clear that they regard meaning as an integral part of their work. They intend their work to express something discerning. According to them, this is not always what the public wants to recognise.

When interviewed, Lisa Brice had just completed a series of "construction" or "3D" paintings [oil paintings with objects such as flashing lights attached], about prostitution in Thailand. At the time, Ms Brice had doubts about the possible public reception of these images. As she explained:

Some of the paintings were quite harsh, definitely not the kind of thing people want to live with, even liberal-thinking people: they were not easy-paintings.

Consequently, she did not expect to sell these paintings when they were exhibited. Yet to her surprise this exhibition was a sell-out! Two German art dealers bought all the paintings, and took them back to Germany to resell. At the time of the exhibition, Ms Brice became contracted to these dealers. The terms of this contract are discussed later.

Beezy Bailey, himself having just married (end of 1991), was confronting the issue of love and marriage in his work. And, with the work of Joyce Ntobe [Bailey's pseudonym], was investigating the idea of perceiving the world through the eyes of a black domestic woman¹.

¹ Besides attempting to view the world through the eyes of a black domestic woman, Bailey is striving to formulate a Visual Art Foundation, and all the proceeds from Ntobe's work he is donating towards this end.

Mario Sickle's sculptures depict the anxiety of the individual struggling with the difficulties of life. And Kendell Geers' subject-matter is even more austere. Besides the political and social emphasis evident in his two dimensional and three dimensional work, he sets out to accost what he considers the traditional notion of what art should look like, and the purpose it serves.

Supporting what he defines as an avant-garde approach to art, Kendell Geers does not use traditional artists' materials. He uses hardware materials, such as enamel paint, because he does not want people to view his work as art. Another reason for not using traditional materials is that he believes traditional art to be dead and empty, that it has run dry.

Kendell Geers described his work broadly as "conceptual expressionism". He explained that his work is not purely conceptual, because it usually has an emotive base, dealing with issues such as violence, sexuality, and the taboos of society. He has learnt, and established, his direction by watching the media. Perceiving modern times to be dominated by neon-signs, and bill-boards, and coca-cola, he believes that in order to be critical, and, to survive coca-cola, one has to enter on its level.

Mentioning Benetton adverts, Kendell Geers remarked that, in his opinion, these adverts are better, and have more to do with art, than a lot of fine art. He then drew the analogy of the Sistine Chapel being an advert for the Catholic Church when it was painted!

Kendell Geers also does not support the theory that if an artist cannot draw, he or she is not a good artist. He maintains that art is not just good technique, although he does concede that an artist must be in control of his or her medium.

He believes that the marketing and organising that are part and parcel of art production, is all a work of art, not just the image which is seen.

Originally confident that art could change the masses, Kendell Geers came to think that the most an artist can do is to change some individuals:

One can challenge, not change: you cannot teach through art.

Evidently, at the time of the interview, Kendell Geers' motivation to produce art was to increase public consciousness of certain issues, which essentially, is what all these artists wish to do, even though their personal reasons differ. The incentives of Mario Sickle and Beezy Bailey were clearly identified.

Beezy Bailey explained his goal:

I had this kind of dream when I was a child, that I wanted to be very very rich. But having acquired all that wealth I had dreamed about [by inheritance], I wanted to make other people rich as well. I wanted to make all the poor people rich... enriched as well as rich - so that they don't have to queue at a single tap at the corner of the street. But I didn't take the whole communist approach, I was very anti that... My dream was basically this: become a famous artist - people buy the work of famous artists. That is what I was taught to believe as a child, and I still believe it. So I thought, if I become famous, I'll make lots of money from my art, which is what is happening now - it's starting to pay off. But there was a reason for becoming famous and making lots of money and that was in order to set up this foundation, which we are now setting up, called the Visual Arts Foundation. This foundation is basically to bring real art into the lives of all South Africans. Our long term plan is to have art schools, and art centres around the country - painting, sculpture, tuition at the centres: tutors coming from abroad to give seminars, but on a massive scale... So Joyce Ntobe [Bailey's pseudonym], who I'm showing with - all the money she is making from her work, is being donated to the foundation, for the rest of her career.

Fearing that making art might not be a lucrative enough profession, Bailey had his doubts about becoming an artist:

When I was at school, they always said I must be an artist - I was hopeless at anything else. And I said no! I won't be able to make enough money! And when I met Andy Warhol in New York, he really liked my art, he put me onto a gallery there - I was reassured that no matter who or what you are, you can make money as an artist;

because I don't think, and I still don't think that he [Warhol] can paint or draw particularly well. But, as a kind of self-promotion, which is what modern communication is so much about in terms of the media, he was king.

Beezy Bailey explained his philosophy further:

What I saw myself doing when I went to art school, was drawing, and drawing art from me, and the actual imagery side of it. Half of my career I felt would be made up of my ability as a fine artist, and the other half would be made up of my ability as a publicist. And I put the two together, and [hope to] make more money than Picasso. That is my ideal. I believe that it is true that if you aim for the stars, you reach the clouds.

So one could say that Beezy Bailey's driving force, besides the creative urge, is to make money.

Whereas, in the 1980's Mario Sickle's main driving force was "the struggle". Nevertheless, he explained, in 1992, how the market had touched artists, in Cape Town:

What is happening now, is greatly affected by what has happened over the last ten years - and I'm specifically referring to black artists, it's the area I generally work in.

Mario Sickle explained that in the 1980's, black artists, and also some white artists, created work that reflected what was happening in South Africa, because of anger and frustration with the political system. The demand for liberation art came mostly from overseas. There, museums, universities, cultural organisations, and political organisations, but not commercial galleries, collected liberation art. The call for this type of art came from Europe, America, and Asia, which Mario Sickle said was so profuse that artists couldn't produce enough work to meet the demand. He in fact closed his gallery in Athlone at this time, simply because there were not enough artists and not enough art to make the gallery viable.

Also locally, emergent cultural organisations and unions, for example, created a need for art production, such as posters and logos, generating much work for artists. But, said Mario Sickle, *with the release of Nelson Mandela, [Feb. 1990] and [the unbanning of] the African*

National Congress, they [artists working for the struggle] have all now been left without an inspirational or motivating force. The challenge is gone now!

For the past two, two and a half years, there has been a state of confusion: directionless [amongst artists in Cape Town]. It's good, and it's bad. It's good in that the artists will get out of that trap of just producing liberation art. The sad thing about the demand of that market, was that they did not demand standards: if you're black and you produce art, and it had a panga in it, or an AK [rifle], or a coffin, or a marching scene, or burning in it, it was enough... The artists became complacent: suddenly overnight, they were mentioned in newspapers, in magazines, they were published, and complacency set in. Whereas now, they have to compete in a market that was always there, but they have to compete, and the standard of their work, I'm not saying all of them, the majority of them, it's not good enough. At present, the market, which is affected by the economic situation, is not as vibrant as it was in the 1980's - it's very quiet at the moment. Everything just dried up - artists are now destitute.

Moreover, Mario Sickle demonstrated:

I myself have stopped working for two years now. I work now, but I work because I'm an artist, I have to produce, I have to work, I have to create; but, not with that urgency, with that passion that was there - that's gone. Now there's just a tiredness - looking for new pastures. Fortunately I'm teaching, so I can still continue being active, but for many of my friends, there is just nothing. There is just no reason to create because they have never participated in the normal art market.

He also observed:

The oil painting market, and the watercolour market: there's always a market for that work; but the competition today is very tight at the top. There are some brilliant watercolourists, some brilliant painters - there are many lousy ones too. But the market is very strange. It is not something you can isolate, and say that is it; because, tomorrow - bang!

According to Mario Sickle market activity in Cape Town, for the past two to three years, prior to 1992, has been in the doldrums. Lisa Brice also experienced this:

The market is so bad at the moment.

Mario Sickle added that some of the artists he knows are selling work,

but if they have an exhibition using the mainstream art market, they sell one piece, or two pieces, whereas before, either the whole exhibition would be a sell out - or it would be a financial success. At the moment it is not happening.

He stated that in the black community,

not even their own business people and organisations, purchase art.

At the time of this research, market activity in Johannesburg was also very subdued, with very little art being sold. As already mentioned, the Everard Read Gallery, catering for the more conservative buyer, was the only Johannesburg gallery still selling a fair amount of work.

Proof of the way in which realistic, popular pictures, were still in demand in Johannesburg, could be seen on the occasion of a landscape exhibition held at the Everard Read Gallery in September 1992. Five artists each showed a substantial amount of work.

Laraine Campbell, using pastels, carbon pencils, charcoal, and turpentine, employed arbitrary colour in her patterned, graphic-type landscapes. Her prices ranged around R2 000, and she sold two works at the show.

Alfred Gundersen's very realistic, fairly moody, watercolour landscapes, were technically highly skilled. His prices were set at around R6 000, and every work he exhibited was sold.

Christopher Haskins' work consisted of photo-realistic, representational, oil paintings. His prices ranged from R3 000 to R5 000, and he too sold every work on exhibition.

Francois Koch's oils were also realistically rendered. Like Gundersen and Haskins, this artist showed himself to be *au fait* with his medium. His prices, reaching R20 000, were the highest at this exhibition. Even though Koch's work is well-known in Johannesburg, only three or four of his paintings were sold on this occasion.

Sheila McNaught Davis' pastel drawings, although graphic, were more expressionistic, and vital, than the other landscapes on show. However her images were rather sketchy, and unfinished, and her handling of her medium was technically not as proficient as that of the other artists. Her prices were affordable, but none of her work was sold.

The landscapes of Gundersen, Haskins, and Koch, were the most realistic or true to life, exhibited. Of these three artists, Gundersen and Haskins sold all their work, whereas Koch sold only three or four works. As the type of image by these three artists was very similar, but Koch's prices so much higher than Gundersen's and Haskins', one could surmise that the public found Koch's prices inhibiting.

Considering that Gundersen and Haskins sold all their work, in the midst of an economic recession, one can deduce that the public still wants to own lifelike, conventional images, but at affordable prices.

Both sell-out artists displayed highly competent technical skill, but it could be said that their work lacked creativity, and zest. In fact, these works fall more into the category of images termed soft, or popular, rather than those artworks that might be regarded as serious. Obviously these images were what the public preferred.

Subdued market activity, except with respect to the types of examples just mentioned, was one factor perceived by some artists concerned about the situation in the South African art world in 1992. It was said that some artists in Johannesburg, as in Cape Town were without creative fervour at this time - possibly for other reasons though, according to Kendell Geers. Prior to 1992, for about five years, there was much work and enthusiasm on the part of Johannesburg

artists. However, in 1992, Kendell Geers noted an apathy, and a lack of energy, amongst his colleagues. He partly attributed this indifference to the collapse of art competitions. He specified the IGI Life Vita Art Now Award, as an indication of how badly artists were faring in Johannesburg at that time. A panel of judges assesses exhibitions held in the Johannesburg area during each calendar year, and chooses artists to be represented at the Vita Art Now annual exhibition, held at the Johannesburg Art Gallery. The criteria for inclusion depend on the overall impact of the exhibitions seen during the year, and the overall quality of the artists' work. Usually a winner is chosen from each quarter's cream of the crop, with one artist from the chosen four quarterly winners becoming the annual award winner. In the second quarter of 1992, however, no winner was chosen as the judges found no artist's work to be good enough!

Another factor that Kendell Geers described is that the art world and Johannesburg artists are very competitive and cut-throat. He said rumours, bad-mouthing, and jealousy are the norm. He finds that the art world is essentially controlled by an insular clique. This of course could crush an artist's career, should he or she fall out with this clique.

Regionalism is another trend noted by Kendell Geers. He said the Johannesburg critics and public, support Johannesburg artists. Should a Cape Town artist, who is well-known and liked in Cape Town, exhibit in Johannesburg, there is usually little appreciation and support for his or her work in Johannesburg, and vice versa. This trend, which, as already stated, is not restricted to South Africa, invariably influences the value of a contemporary artwork. This value, then, depends on where the work is exhibited and sold.

That local art which, according to some dealers interviewed, is generally considered an investment in South Africa, is not an international asset. This, according to local and international trends, is possibly, owing to regionalism. However, Beezy Bailey contested this sentiment. He thinks that very soon, certain South African artists are going to be accepted into the international art scene,

because the prices between [the work of] a successful artist in South Africa, and a successful artist in the international community, are like chalk and cheese. Somebody my

age, with my level of success, in England, or Germany, or New York, or Tokyo, is a millionaire - I'm far from that, but I'm a successful South African artist.

South Africa is being accepted back into the international community, which should help bring South African art to the fore internationally². Beezy Bailey estimates that foreigners will buy South African art, once they realise that they can acquire good contemporary art in South Africa at extremely reasonable prices compared with contemporary art prices in their own countries. Lisa Brice becoming contracted to German dealers, may be proof of what Bailey predicts.

Beezy Bailey therefore encourages those South Africans wishing to invest in hard assets to consider the local art market, believing that local contemporary art prices may catch up with international prices. In his experience:

Local businessmen don't know about this because they are not involved with the contemporary art scene.

He has found that once a contemporary artwork exceeds the value of R10 000, the work is then regarded as a hard asset by the buying public.

Christopher Till believes that, for the most part, international art is regarded as an investment because it is an international commodity; but, supporting Beezy Bailey's attitude, he maintains that good contemporary local artworks can be regarded as a potential investment:

The top stuff - I reckon it can. There is no reason why South African art shouldn't be part of an international art market.

As established in this thesis, for art to be included in any market, it needs to be promoted. Beezy

² Since the release of Nelson Mandela and the beginning of the abolition of apartheid laws in 1990, international trade embargoes have been lifted against South Africa. South Africa has again been included in the international community, opening opportunities for much more interaction between this country and the world.

Bailey said, the marketing of art is what finances the production of art.

He employs a secretary, owns a computer, and a fax machine, all to administer his career, which he terms a full, growing business. Before an exhibition, he contacts every magazine, every newspaper in the country, as well as SABC television, in order to familiarise the media, and, in turn, the public, of his activities, and possibly to invite interviews.

According to this, to be a successful artist, as Beezy Bailey reports himself to be, it seems that one needs to be fairly well-known. Artists must exhibit regularly, and feature in publications, for the public to become acquainted with them.

In Lisa Brice's opinion:

You have to exhibit your work, otherwise what's the point of doing anything, unless it's totally self-indulgent?... If nobody knows you, you are certainly not going to sell anything.

She also believes that competitions, such as the Volkskas Atelier Award, and the Triennial, which may cease to exist, provide exposure for artists, despite the disputes³ surrounding these competitions:

If you are represented on these exhibitions, people seem to have heard of you, and when that starts happening, people want to, or are more interested in, buying your work; because, it's been recognised by people in the know.

Besides exhibitions, competitions, and media coverage it seems that a controversy can also afford an artist exposure. Beezy Bailey, for example, had much written about him concerning his Joyce Ntobe exhibition held in March 1992, in Cape Town. Indicating how critics perceive him, Andrew Putter writing for *The Argus*, remarked on Bailey's joint Ntobe show:

³ Much polemic has resulted since the start of corporate competitions. Companies have been criticised for their choice of judges, and the means of judging employed, for the art and artists represented, and have, in most cases, become caught-up in prevailing political debates.

Beezy Bailey may be full of crap a lot of the time but no one can say that he's not adept at preparing temptingly tasty food for thought. (Putter, 1992 p 8)

As Mario Sickle said:

Whether people buy Beezy Bailey's work because of his art, or because of his character [being a colourful, eccentric, exhibitionist] is very difficult to say. I would like to think that people buy the art because of the art... There is nothing wrong with developing an - image consciously, like some artists - it's just business.

Yet Mario Sickle believes, and teaches his students, that,

ultimately, it's your work that is going to speak for you. I believe you become secondary - it's the impact of your work [that counts].

Referring to the question of controversies providing artists with publicity, Mario Sickle related the incident when, about ten years ago, Christo Coetzee, a renowned artist, returning from Europe, had an exhibition at the Association of Arts gallery in Cape Town. The exhibition was slated by the critics, and the public, and in response (whether consciously or in anger, is unknown), the artist slashed all the work on the exhibition. This event became highly publicised because artists rarely destroy work publically.

And people started buying pieces of his canvas that he had slashed because it had become quite a happening!

Referring to influences determining trends, Estelle Jacobs mentioned self-promotion, of which she is not greatly in favour. More specifically on the subject of marketing, she continued,

If you are prepared to promote yourself, chase the media, and perhaps employ a PR [public relations officer] or consultant - if you put out a lot of hype about your work, and if you exhibit often enough, and you are on enough interviews, and you get into enough newspapers, and you're in enough social pages - the public gets to know who you are, and maybe they buy. So it [self-promotion] does work.

Nonetheless, she also said:

I don't believe in over-exposure. I think over-exposure can ruin artists; but, artists need to exhibit fairly frequently - frequently enough for the public not to forget them.

It is interesting to note that Beezy Bailey, who very much supports self-promotion, was not represented in any corporate collection, nor had he ever won an award in art competitions when interviewed.

I feel they [competitions] have kind of boycotted me - I feel quite hard done by at this stage.

It seems that artists could find themselves in a predicament with regard to marketing. As Christopher Till pointed out:

It's [marketing] part and parcel of business practice. On the one hand is the person who has created and is engaged in producing art; on the other hand there is the art market, and there are different people involved with both. I think it is difficult, quite often, for the artist to be actively involved in the marketing and that is why there are dealers and agents, so that is taken care of. It does cross over, of course: there are fine artists who promote themselves, and promote themselves pretty well. But that commercial thing is there. If you don't bring your work to the attention of the potential public, you can sit in isolation.

The choice of how artists wish to promote their work lies with the artists themselves. Mario Sickle, for example, has chosen not to use galleries to exhibit and sell his work. He said that this was for various reasons, including receiving the full price for his work. Also, he prefers to have one spectator at a time looking at his work, so that nothing, or no-one, interferes with the communication between the spectator, and the work. As a result, it has taken him a long time to become known by the Cape Town art-buying public. Now, he has a personal mailing list, which, when he has work to sell, he sends out to the people who, over the years, have shown an interest in his work.

Some artists, like Mario Sickle, and Beezy Bailey, manage their own promotion, but many artists have little interest or aptitude for business and marketing. Consequently, most practicing artists use galleries to market their work: as many as ninety-five percent, said Mario Sickle. Referring to Robert Slingsby he said:

You see how the gallery owner, the dealers nurture him along, and quite a few others...Dealers play a major role in developing the arts, and artists; although, their primary concern for me would be a financial one, because they're conducting a business.

Clearly, artist and dealer heavily depend on each other for financial success. Many artists have a good, symbiotic working relationship with the dealer, or dealers, who handle their work; but, there are a number of areas of dissatisfaction between artists and dealers. Mario Sickle's view of working with dealers:

It's terribly painful. The dealer is in a position of power, in that he's dealing with many artists: and it's like he sits with a wand in his hand saying okay, you and you and you...In the mainstream you find artists mainly go to the dealer, it's very seldom the other way around. I've had two local art gallery owners approaching me, but I know how they operate because I had a gallery.

He added that one has to understand how the gallery system works in order to appreciate it, *but there are definitely dealers with no scruples!*

A major source of contention between dealers and artists is payment for work sold. The dealer's argument is that he or she has to wait for the client, who has bought the work, to pay him or her, before the artist can be paid. This can take up to two months. The dealer also has to contend with clients insisting on discount--especially if the client has bought more than one work. Mario Sickle explained this from the artist's viewpoint:

I think it's ridiculous that the artist has to wait six weeks or two months, and when he gets his cheque, it's halved.

Kendell Geers believes dealers and artists to be volatile people, who nonetheless, need each other. He does feel though, that if an artist is to complain about dealers and galleries, and their costs,

then that artist should market and exhibit his or her work elsewhere. However, artists are limited in their choice of places to market and sell their work. Other avenues, such as the method used by Mario Sickle, can mean that it takes many years to be established, which many artists, financially, cannot afford.

Other disputes arise from dealers dictating to artists on what they must produce, as well as from whether dealers have a responsibility towards artists. Although the activities of the eighties made galleries in Cape Town take note of liberation art, for example, they did not support it, said Mario Sickle:

They [Cape Town galleries] don't accept our art. They don't exhibit our art - so what is that? It's not a blatant, "you will paint this,"...but they dictate, not what must be done, but what they are prepared to handle.

In Mr Sickle's experience, Johannesburg galleries dictate to black artists, and possibly white artists too, in a different kind of way:

I've seen the gallery owners come into an artist's studio and say, "I want that, and I don't like that. Put some more people around here. I don't like the colour here - use a bit more ochre." And the artists do it!

Mario Sickle explained why he believed the Cape Town art market to be so flat at the time of this research, and why galleries often do not support local emergent artists:

Quite a few of the dealers in Cape Town have been dealing since the 1950's [1970's is more accurate], and they themselves refuse to recognise the development in art. They are still dealing with Maggie Laubser, and Gerard Sekoto; because they are safe.

One can argue that there is a demand in the market for old, established names. Also, as Estelle Jacobs has experienced, commercial galleries struggle to sell serious contemporary art, so if they [dealers] want to make a living, they have to sell commercially viable art.

Yet, as Mario Sickle pointed out:

If you're in a business, and you sell a product: that is a product that people are going to buy, because, you are marketing whatever you are wanting to sell...what is available, is what is going to be bought.

Interesting to reflect on are statements such as the following, by Hauser, in 1951, about how the art trade affects contemporary art:

- The fine art trade also involves the estrangement of the public from contemporary art.*
- *The dealers prefer to advertise the art of previous ages, for the simple reason that, as has been rightly said, the products of this art cannot multiply and, therefore, cannot depreciate - they are the object of the least risky speculation. (Hauser, 1951 p 469)*

Loius Schachat is one dealer who believes that he has no responsibility to support artists, because the dealership is a private business, which is not state subsidised. There is no question on the subject of Mr Schachat looking after the interests of his clients with professionalism, but his obligations do not extend towards artists:

I heard again the other day that galleries don't do enough for young artists; but, this is a private business. It's for us to decide how we are going to run our business - we have no responsibility to the artist... There's no subsidy for this type of business.

Here, it appears as though the dealer sometimes forgets that art, and in fact artists, afford him financial success. Dealing predominantly in work by deceased artists, Loius Schachat can sustain this rather arrogant attitude, without his business being adversely affected.

Trent Read on the other hand, who relies on contemporary artists to provide him with work for his gallery, voiced a contrasting assessment:

You're [the gallery business] only as good as your artists.

Accordingly, it seems that Trent Read spends an equal amount of effort keeping both client and artist happy. As Joe Wolpe emphatically believes: a dealer does have a responsibility towards artists, because without artists, the dealer would be out of a job.

It appears that this fragile balance is understood by the dealers of contemporary art who were interviewed. Desire Resnick, for example, stated:

I think pricing is a difficult one [issue]. I think one must be fair to everybody. The artist, and the customer must feel comfortable, and I must make enough to continue the business.

Some artists become contracted to galleries because they need exposure and income. Beezy Bailey is one artist who is very against this system:

I refuse to sign anything that inhibits my creativity.

Asked to explain this statement:

You sign a contract with gallery X in Johannesburg. They up your prices from R1 000 to R10 000 in the next few months. They manage to sell two or three works for R10 000 each, and then they make bloody sure that you produce those same kind of images as the ones already sold.

Trent Read presented one dealer's argument:

We [Everard Read Gallery] have been accused of...selling the same image, but you know, we have never told the artist what to paint. If they [artists] paint four different things and A sells, and B, C, and D don't, what tends to happen, is the artist may do another work similar to A, you can't force anyone to buy the other three, so it's the market forces at work there. If you hang three things up by an artist and the public likes A, and come to us, and say "we wouldn't mind another one like that," we pass that information onto the artist. It's up to them to do it, or not. But, that's the way the market works... I always make absolutely clear to an artist that I will never interfere with their artistic licence, but what I am able to say to them, and I think it is my role to do so: if you like painting both A and B - A will sell better. I won't ever force the artist to paint something for the market...but the public do have the final say... Art is very elitist. People talk about art for the masses...your mass market wants soft, easy-listening images. The market that wants the more sophisticated, or avant-garde, or thoughtful art, is minute worldwide - and I think it's arrogant to try to change that.

Is it not, however the dealer's role to develop public taste?

Hauser offers views on how dealers can limit, and even possibly prescribe to, artists:

The development of the art trade into an independent business has a far reaching influence on modern art life. It leads, above all, to the specialization of painters according to definite genres, since the art dealers ask them again and again for the kind of work that proves to be the most saleable... The artist becomes more and more dependent on the art dealer for his daily bread, and the dealer finds it increasingly easy to dictate prices to him, the more the public accustoms itself to buying from the dealer rather than ordering direct from the artist. (p 468-469)

Trent Read said that he deals with artists by verbal agreement:

I think a contract is not worth the paper it is written on... When we first start dealing with an artist, the artist is free to date elsewhere. If we start selling everything they produce, and we feel we can put a major marketing push behind them, we say okay, let's go steady.

If an artist's work is not selling, he or she might be advised to try marketing their work elsewhere or, said Mr Read,

you give advice - try painting something else - if you believe in their inherent worth.

When interviewed Trent Read was preparing to open the new Everard Read Contemporary Gallery⁴, which is an extremely ambitious venture considering that most galleries in Johannesburg are about to close, due to the recession:

We wouldn't be doing it without faith in the country, and faith in the artists... It is a risk - I hope we make some money - but I'm trying to make it a nurturing greenhouse, where talent can be protected, by hopefully selling - earning a living so that they [artists] don't

⁴ Opened in September 1992. However this venture proved unsuccessful as the Everard Read Contemporary Gallery closed in November 1994.

have to go out and do other things.

In this new gallery, Mr Read will be taking fifty percent commission, but this will cover all charges. This differs from most commercial galleries in South Africa that take forty percent commission, with the artist paying fifty percent of exhibition costs, which can be a problem if no work exhibited is sold.

Since the 1970's, commission charges have increased in South Africa.

- *The commission charged on sales on the South African art market ranges between 20% and 33,3%, seldom higher, although 50% is quite common abroad. (E Berman, 1973 p 12)*

Financially, both collectors, and artists are directly affected by this change.

Kendell Geers believed that the Everard Read Contemporary Gallery would be the last test of whether the public in South Africa might be prepared to support the more daring, esoteric, avant-garde, contemporary artist, or whether that public would retain its taste for easy-to-live-with, realistic paintings, as Trent Read was hoping to encourage some of the conservative clients of the Everard Read Gallery to buy at his new gallery, relying on his reputation to draw public confidence, and buyers.

In Kendell Geers' experience, images that are even slightly contentious, are not bought in South Africa. Both he, and Lisa Brice believe the art buying public in South Africa to be very conservative. Nevertheless, they asserted that good art of any type will sell, if dealers, and museums, and people in the know, support and promote such work. Kendell Geers affirmed that, *people will buy [good art]; but, they have to be told what to buy though!*

Although Mario Sickle thinks that the buying market is fickle, he also maintained that good art sells:

I believe any good work will sell - it communicates!

This research has indicated that, as a result of the recession, local art sales, especially those of

serious, esoteric images, have been down in the early 1990's. Therefore, it seems that good art sells; but, only if the economic climate is stable. This supports the theory of those who say that art is a luxury.

Beezy Bailey has experienced with the buying public,

they buy it [art], because they like it. Very few people buy it [art] because it's a good investment [although Bailey personally believes that art is an investment]. Because people buy art to adorn their houses - they want it to be pretty. They make investments in the stock exchange, and things like cars, and property... Of course it's [art is] a status symbol. It's something that's pretty, that has acquired popularity throughout the ages - and it has nothing to do with the media...it has to do with good art. Good art is appreciated. The people who have it are patrons - and the history of art, is the history of patronage.

Mario Sickle explained his perceptions of why people buy art:

A proportion of the buying public are yuppies: for their cottages they want something that will first of all please them - it's got to enhance the furniture. In fact, why not? It's their space, they can do what they want to in their space - that's a large proportion of the buying public. Then of course you get the individuals who buy for investment, and that's where your name comes in - who you are - it's part investment, and partly it's because they genuinely like your work. If you see an art lover - it's amazing. It inspires you to work - not that he is going to buy it. But if a person shows true appreciation for what you are doing, then the monetary exchange is just a bonus. I know people who buy work because it affects them; but, they are a very small percentage of the buying public.

Lisa Brice was asked whether, in her experience, people rely on the reputation of the artist when buying an artwork.

Yes, definitely I would say so, because a lot of people are buying work, not on such a large scale in this country I don't think, but they are buying work for investment. And maybe even a lot of the time they don't particularly like the work...it's so and so's work

and the word is that the prices of this artist is going to go up, and now is the time to buy, and they'll buy it. Once you've some kind of name for yourself, then people will be buying for other reasons, other than just because they like it, especially if a large gallery has shown interest, like the National Gallery. Then it's an indication to you, the collector, that the work is a good investment.

Kendell Geers echoed this sentiment, saying that the concern of the vast majority of collectors when buying art is money, especially when it comes to the resale value of the work.

Some interviewees, especially dealers, but also Mario Sickle who has been a dealer too, believe that the public's aesthetic appreciation has improved, and become more widely spread. However, supporting Lisa Brice's view, Kendell Geers' response to this was:

The public has grown to appreciate art in financial terms. People buy names!

Whereas Beezy Bailey rationalised that, it's [buying a name] something that's gone on for centuries.

It's not a new thing - it's just taken a different form because of the media time we live in. It's buying the king, the top, the person who is known to be the best.

Accordingly, how does an artist decide the price of his or her work?

Beezy Bailey said that prices are established by how much people are prepared to pay.

Andy Warhol...proved that the value of art was the fame of the person who painted it... People are prepared to pay \$200 000 for an image that was made in Andy Warhol's factory - that he didn't necessarily sign.

If Beezy Bailey is right, well-known artists can command what they will for an artwork because they are famous, not necessarily because they are presenting an outstanding work of art. Beezy Bailey has experienced that as he becomes better known by the public, his work increases in value accordingly, averaging about a one-hundred percent increase every three years.

Mario Sickle said that pricing is a very individual matter:

The price that you set is determined by labour, by your own appreciation of the work, and it's determined by your need to sell... It also depends on what you are selling. If you are selling a sculpture - it's a one off: the price is determined by who is buying it. That is a factor, especially when we are trying to encourage the local communities to support local artists: you make the prices, not necessarily cheaper, you have a minimum that you are prepared to sell the work for.

Alternatively, if the buyer is affluent, the artist should charge more for a painting or sculpture, contended Mario Sickle, however he added:

If you are selling prints, lino prints, editions, copies of editions, etc., you can't [change the price in relation to the buyer]. You have to have one price... You can't change the price - it's bad business.

Mario Sickle responded on the subject of prices fixed by the reputation of the artist:

Any artist who dedicates his time and effort, you might not see it, and money, year after year, and he values his own work, not as a saleable commodity, but he sees that it is bearing fruit, all his hard work - and there is definite development and growth: yes, he'll be the first one to say yes [that prices rising according to the reputation of the artist, is good]. Art is like any other business: being an artist is like being a business...your materials are costing you more, the time is more expensive. The same things which affect other markets, products: the same things affect you, because, you have to buy materials.

Artists also need to be aware that pricing is closely linked to marketing, in that the price of a work determines the type of market to which the work will be exposed. Remembering that general public opinion tends to regard cheap commodities as inferior, artists must price their work accordingly.

Being an artist, one is caught up in market forces, as in any profession. Art might transcend the physical plane, but artists cannot. Hence they are directly, and indirectly, affected and influenced

by trends that the world establishes, and dictates. As Mario Sickle indicated,

If you're talking about art, art production, and the market in the cultural milieu, then there are a lot of forces which affect, not only the market, but the artist - what he produces - who he produces for.

In South Africa, for example, a limited art market exists. There are a more or less fixed number of institutions, and museums that collect art, and as in Mario Sickle's experience,

- people will buy one, maybe two [works]. So the saturation point, especially when they're [artists] only local, dealing in the local market, [comes quickly].

Lisa Brice believes that the artist is also limited by the conservatism of the art buying public. Kendell Geers is one artist personally affected by this circumstance. When interviewed, he did not see a future for himself as an artist in South Africa, because he was certain that with the prevailing conservatism, his art would not be supported locally. Nevertheless, he stopped working at the Goodman Gallery, where he was involved with the general running of the gallery, at the end of 1992, in order to paint full time. He maintained that a recession is a time to make a name for oneself as an artist. He reasoned that when the economy improved, he would be established. Since he has had work included in the National Gallery, the Johannesburg Art Gallery, the collections of Wits and Pretoria universities, more individuals are buying his work.

To overcome flooding any one market, Mario Sickle suggested that,

if you have opportunity to sell - spread further afield - like Johannesburg.

However, the artist may then be confronted with another limiting factor, namely regionalism.

Regionalism can be attributed partly to fashion, since the vogue in one centre can differ from that of another. As Kendell Geers said, fashion is fickle. Contemporary artists especially, often come into, and then go out of fashion. He cited Judith Mason, who exhibited in Johannesburg in 1992, as an example of an artist exposed to fashion:

Judith Mason was South Africa's star artist ten years ago; but, now she struggles to get

an exhibition, and if she does, the critics take her apart.

A meteoric rise to fame places many pressures on a young artist to produce work. Alternatively, it can result in complacency. Lisa Brice is one artist undaunted by sudden recognition. She was very positive about being contracted to her German dealers.

I was very lucky that I met these German people.

She explained her contract:

Everything I do from now on, they have first option on, and they will more than likely buy it, if it's up to standard - I can't do some rubbish, and expect them to take it. I was a bit worried about it, because I am South African - and say the National Gallery wanted to buy something, then what would happen? Am I not allowed to sell to someone else? It's not quite that rigid - I can. I can give work away, and I can make private sales. They are just worried, when they are putting this kind of money into an artist they are obviously going to promote, that another international gallery might be interested. They [other overseas dealers] might see the work in these people's gallery, and the work is obviously much more expensive through them, and they will then go to the country [of the artist], to try to find the artist... We haven't signed anything yet. We've just shaken on it - they seemed to take that quite seriously! Before I sign anything, I'll get lawyers [to check the contract]. Providing it doesn't limit me, I'll go with it⁵.

In order to overcome restrictions that dealers might place on artists, and to avoid being at the mercy of dealers, Mario Sickle suggested that artists play a more active role in the promotional side of the art market.

You see, the artist has a large role to play in developing the art market, and that is what is going to happen eventually. As a matter of fact it is starting to happen now, where the

⁵ When interviewed in February 1992, Ms Brice had just met the German dealers, and not much had been finalised, other than an exhibition for which she was committed to produce work, by the end of the year.

present art structure is going to be forced to take notice... What has happened now, through desperation... these artists [not represented in galleries] [are] selling their work in Greenmarket Square... It's a very low level, selling work on pavements, but it's a start. They have to - the galleries don't want to deal with their work.

With so much emphasis on the marketing, and promotion of art, Beezy Bailey was asked whether this doesn't encourage the public to have more regard for the artist, than for the image?

No I don't. That's the catch; because, all along you have to be a true artist in order to succeed.

Beezy Bailey was reminded, that, when talking about Andy Warhol earlier in the interview, he had categorically said that anyone, irrespective of artistic ability, depending on their promotional skills, or the promotion he or she receives, can become a successful artist. He responded:

You are right, you have caught me out very well. I am pushing the fact that I personally believe, and accept, that a good artist is one that can draw well. I don't think Andy Warhol could draw well, but I consider him to be a great artist, in terms of how he made his whole career, and his images portray the media age that he lived in, in the truest sense.

He then postulated what effect marketing might have on art history:

He [Warhol] has gone down in history: our great-grandchildren are going to read about Andy Warhol, and Picasso on the same level, and that blows my mind; because Picasso is a great artist in the traditional sense - the same way as Michelangelo, and Rembrandt [were]. Andy Warhol was a great artist in the twentieth century sense.

Besides galleries, corporate sponsored competitions give artists exposure. Corporations have become modern patrons of art. Since the patronage of art is essential for the continued production of art, continued corporate support for art is vital. According to this research, it is unknown whether acquisitions for corporate collections are decreasing, but it seems that sponsorship for competitions might be!

On The Rembrandt Art Foundation withdrawing sponsorship for the Cape Town Triennial, Christopher Till commented:

The sponsor, who has been fairly prominent, has been highly criticised; because they've been caught up in the ongoing debates of accountability, consultation, community participation - and they've backed away from being involved in the highly charged socio-political climate which art finds itself falling into. And my fear is, because of social issues such as housing, primary education, and health care, corporate support is on the wane for the visual arts. And this will have a very serious effect on what happens [to the visual arts]; because, the government is unable to provide great sums of money.

There is no longer any tax relief for companies supporting the arts. Mr Till ominously predicted that,

unless there is some kind of government policy, which identifies opportunity for relief for companies, I think we're in for trouble!

This excerpt from an article on the 1988 Triennial, written by Barry Ronge for the Sunday Times, is an indication of the criticisms that corporate sponsors are up against:

The problem is not necessarily with the quality of the work but with its sameness. The new establishment heroes - William Kentridge, Peter Schutz, Clive van den Berg, Margaret Vorster, etc. - are all doing exactly the same work and the whole show seems to have been sealed in a time capsule or, more accurately, to have landed in a dead end, which raises questions about sponsored art competitions. Culture, non-racial and progressive, has become a popular, safe investment for large corporations, for a combination of tax, image and promotional reasons. They have proliferated in the last five years and we now have total prize money for the visual arts that is in excess of R100 000, but this has proved to be a double-edged sword. One cannot help observing that a new hegemony has emerged, which some call the Art Mafia and other refer to more delicately as "a cartel of academic and sponsorship interests." Look across the range of the sponsored art exhibitions and one sees the same group of academics, museum directors and art honchos judging all the shows, and as a result the same kind of art, indeed the

same artists, are winning over and over again⁶. (Ronge, 1988)

Barry Ronge continued to discuss how some black artists have been affected by the emergence of corporate competitions:

Dr Anita Nettleton of Wits University's History of Art department describes how the rural artists, especially those of Venda, make objects and perceive themselves as craftsmen, but now that they have been discovered they are abandoning their traditional, vital creations to make sculptures that will fit a competition panel's requirements.

Although there is much truth in Barry Ronge's statements, and even though competitions do prescribe certain criteria, they nonetheless still provide opportunities for artists to exhibit and have their work seen by a fairly large public. Also, once represented on a competition, artists tend to receive recognition, which encourages the public and institutions to buy those artists' work.

Christopher Till proposed some effects that less corporate sponsorship, and a depressed economy, might have on artists:

I think it's going to result in a thinning out of artists who might have been known to be commercially successful - but with the recession, with the changing perception, with all of those factors, it's thinning out the ranks. And it's the best, and the toughest, and the most dedicated that survive, and are able to make it through this - others drop away... It's not an easy job to earn one's keep as an artist in the current climate: purchases are down, galleries are closing... The fact that the economy is bad affects the art market, and it affects the livelihood of artists, it affects the availability of artists' work, it affects the nature of the exhibitions that are put on.

⁶ In contrast: the 1991 Triennial showed many new artists, and many well-known, reputedly good artists were excluded from the exhibition, which offended many art world people. Linda Givon was one dealer who disapproved of some established artists, such as Norman Catherine, whom she represents, being omitted. She spoke out strongly against the Triennial, on national television.

In order to be successful, or even just to sell work, do artists have to compromise themselves, or their art, in any way? The need to sell work, and the need for recognition, can, depending on the integrity of the artist, cause an artist to produce what he or she expects the supporting public wants to see, and buy - often at the expense of creativity. Beezy Bailey's view on this was,

I don't call that art, and I don't call those people artists!

In his opinion,

the greatest challenge to an artist is success. Once success bites - if you can continue on your crusade and do something new, which does not depend on the sale of the painting [and repeating what was sold successfully], then you can make great discoveries. Then you become an artist.

Christopher Till also commented on artists painting for the market:

Yes there is that, and you see it at the Triennial, and the National Drawing Competition, for example. People [artists] look at who has won, and then you'll suddenly see a flood of style, which emulates that; but, in fact...I don't think you can paint for the market to any great degree, if you are a serious artist. You can paint for the market, if you place yourself in the Zoolake art-in-the-park category, or in the picture-framer art gallery category, or the wall decoration category, then I think you [the artist] can, but not of serious art making. I think you reveal pretty quickly.

Nevertheless, it can be deduced that if the artist creates art that the public likes to behold, so long as the style is consistent, he or she will earn the public's esteem, and confidence, and eventually its support.

Estelle Jacobs was asked whether the increased importance of marketing art could have an effect on the image:

I think that depends on the integrity of the artist... If the artist believes in the quality of art, I don't think they will be overly affected by what the market, and the buyers want... It becomes quite easy eventually, to judge what is going to sell.

Adding that if the artist wants to make a living out of his or her art, "they have to make what sells." She therefore maintains that it is very difficult for the artist wishing to make a living from their art, not to be swayed by what the public wants,

and maybe rightly so, if they need to make a living from it. But then I do think the image is affected by this; because, they [artists] then make the kind of art, which they know is going to sell.

Lisa Brice agreed with Estelle Jacobs, that

if it's [selling work] is their only income, I'm sure they [artists] would have to compromise themselves somewhere along the line.

Is there any way that an artist could produce art for money without a compromise? How does such an artist survive?

Lisa Brice suggested that an artist could perhaps produce graphic prints such as etchings, or linocuts, because prints are cheaper than paintings to produce. Many prints, on paper, can be made in an edition, making the images affordable and therefore more accessible to a wider public. She mentioned that Brett Murray, a friend and fellow artist, had produced badge-type sculptures of painted bleeding hearts that had a Mexican influence, which were small and affordable:

It's not that he's compromising himself, I don't think...they were quite fun, but there's a seriousness in them too... He sold them very quickly and got some money in quickly, which is what he needed to do.

According to Mario Sickle, linocuts are a popular medium amongst Cape Town artists because they are quick to execute (and can therefore be reasonably priced), yet effective.

Alternatively, Lisa Brice proposed part-time teaching for extra income,

so that you can use that as your bread and butter money. You can still be true to your painting - you don't have to compromise yourself in any way.

Many artists however find that part-time work is not lucrative enough, and they then have to resort to full-time employment. Even though his or her job may be in an art environment, the artist still has to find time, after working hours, to produce art and this can be very tiring. Undoubtedly, such an artist will create less.

Lisa Brice maintained that,

as an artist, I think it's extremely important to be fairly organised-- to keep in contact with what is happening, which shows are coming up, and [to] work constantly... You have to treat painting as a nine-to-five job - it's difficult enough anyway. And it's very important to document your work: you can see a progression. Keep articles written on you - it's like a CV. Like these German gallery owners: they want some sort of assurance that I am a stable, practicing artist - I have a studio - they invested a lot of money in my work...they want some indication that I'm serious about what I'm doing - not some fly by night.

Desire Resnick explained another means of income that some artists practice:

I've got a few artists who do two types of work, soul work and commercial work. The commercial work gives them the opportunity to continue creating what they want, so they don't necessarily have to go and get another job.

In doing this it could be said that artists compromise not only themselves, but art, because, since they prescribe to certain formulae, commercial images are invariably bad images in terms of the way the subject is rendered. Also by creating popular, saleable images, the artists' own "soul" work may become tainted by the techniques employed to produce commercial work.

The romantic idea that artists can exist frugally in their studios, can no longer be entertained. Rent and materials are exorbitant, not to mention exhibition costs, and generally the cost of living is excessive. Consequently, many artists, even those with successful sales records, have to resort to alternative employment.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Returning to my initial motivation for researching this topic I have to conclude that, while a number of answers to my initial questions have elicited thought-provoking responses from the interviewees, the problem of *l'art pour l'art*, or art as investment, or a combination of both, remains a conundrum for all parties concerned, including myself. I nevertheless hope that some understandings have emerged regarding the complexities of the South Africa art market and the possible manipulative effects this market may have on aspiring artists.

Having completed this research, my conclusion is that strong evidence exists that an increasing number of people in South Africa do buy art with financial profit in mind. Even the work of recognised local contemporary artists is reported to be bought with a view to the investment potential by some buyers. Of course prices for contemporary artists' works are not as entrenched or stable, mainly because of changing fashions. But, the possibility that such artwork may increase in value in the future, as the artist's work comes to be more in demand, and held in higher esteem, is enough incentive for some of the buying public to gamble.

Interestingly, the youngest artists interviewed, Lisa Brice, and Kendell Geers, have been more exposed to buyers wanting their work for financial gain, than Beezy Bailey, and Mario Sickle. Fittingly, Mario Sickle, the oldest artist interviewed, has had the least contact with speculative buyers. This may be an indication that with each passing year, more people are considering contemporary artists' work a potential investment.

If investment prompts more people to buy art, artists have more opportunities to sell work. Ethel Kaster believes that the public should be encouraged to view art as an investment, because

the more people buy art, the more work there is going to be for all artists.

Increased buying of course benefits artists, but the disadvantages of art being exploited for investment purposes cannot be ignored.

Having already cited some of these disadvantages for the consumers of art in the body of this thesis, I would now like to highlight what I perceive to be some of the disadvantages for artists, when art, specifically contemporary art, is bought as an investment.

For an artist's work to be regarded as an investment, the artist must have an established reputation. Besides exhibitions, competitions, and inclusion in recognised collections, media coverage plays a large part in establishing an artist's reputation. In this instance the artist must rely on the integrity of the critic for accurate criticism. If the critic is not independent, or lacks integrity, a good artist might receive a bad reputation. Alternatively, a bad artist might receive an overblown reputation. This of course would be detrimental to the artist as well as to the uninformed patron.

Evidently a well executed, good image is not enough for a picture to secure a high or even reasonable price if the artist is unknown. Since the aesthetic value of an artwork is such a subjective thing, the financial value can only be decided according to the reputation of the artist because it is supposedly more tangible. Consequently an unknown artist might not receive the amount of remuneration that an image of his or hers deserves. Also, a well-known artist might receive a high price for a low quality artwork just because of the dictates of his or her reputation.

How is it that the artist has become more important than the work of art? Perhaps the public is more interested in acquiring "the artist" than a quality piece of art? This situation encourages the public to be more interested, and involved with the artist, than with the image.

The status of the artist has certainly changed through the ages. Prior to the Renaissance, the art or craft produced by the artist was all important, while the artist remained anonymous. Whereas the present situation approves,

the modern adulation of the artist. (Hauser, 1951 p 128)

It was suggested by a couple of the interviewees that if the public likes a particular style or genre

of an artist then public demand calls for that style or genre to be repeated. I should imagine that this phenomenon becomes even further entrenched when the public views this art as an investment.

For example, many people want to own a realistic landscape by John Meyer. If all John Meyer's potential buyers were to be satisfied, he would have to produce many of the same type of paintings. Ten years ago, a Meyer landscape would have cost R2 000, today it could cost the buyer up to R30 000. If John Meyer were to develop his style into simplified abstract landscape, for example, his work might not enjoy such popular demand, and buyers might hesitate to pay R30 000 for a changed image. The financial value of his work would more than likely become a confused issue.

It seems that the artist has a responsibility to his or her buyers to continue in the vein which afforded him or her public notice and support. If there was not such great emphasis on the financial value of the work, the public might be more open to allowing the artist to develop in different directions.

The market, as it exists, makes it very tempting for the artist, knowing that there is a buyer waiting to pay R30 000, to repeat what was successfully accomplished and supported before. Besides the greater effort required in struggling with something new, the artist gambles with being rejected by the art world, and his or her patrons.

I have postulated what effect this, and other factors, caused by art being used as investment, might have on art itself. However, elaboration on this theme is beyond the scope of this research.

Ironically though, investment in art might just safeguard the continued support for visual art in this country. The importance of art, during many periods in history, has been perceived and promoted as a social asset. At this time in South Africa's history, those institutions that make funds available for the improvement of society, which have always included funding for the arts, are now concentrating on providing funds for housing, school education, and health care for the

underprivileged sections of the community. As John Gaunt, public affairs consultant for Standard Bank, has been quoted to have said:

The arts can't have it both ways. If they accept that there's a social responsibility component in arts funding, they have to accept that they're in competition with other social investment demands which, I suspect, most sectors of society would accept as more pressing... Arts funding is likely to suffer as long as it is represented as social responsibility funding. The arts should consider presenting themselves more as a marketing tool. (Ludman, 1992 p 30)

Investment in art could most certainly be a "marketing tool".

Since, at this time in history, artists need to sell work to earn a living, they will encounter current trends throughout their careers: including art bought and sold for investment reasons. The market lends itself to manipulation, especially since art is a transactional commodity, with buyers often possessing little knowledge and understanding of art.

Artists and their work can easily become compromised, especially when the need to sell work arises.

One cannot expect the market to change in order to safeguard artists, but perhaps learning what to expect in the marketplace should be a greater, even formal, part of art education for artists.

With the emergence of the uninformed patron, artists have been given far greater freedom to produce work of their own choice. However, with this freedom, I believe that artists' responsibility to art, and in fact humanity, has increased.

Also,

in the transition from private patronage to the free, unprotected market, artists have to wage a sterner fight for their material existence than ever before. (Hauser, 1951 p 328)

Certainly artists must sell work to enable them to continue making art, but perhaps they should concentrate less on the production of art as a saleable commodity, in order to encourage patrons to regard art, and not just price tags.

Estelle Jacobs is so despondent about what commercialism has done to art, that she concludes that art should be neither bought nor sold, other than for public collections. This, however, is not the ideal solution for the practicing artist at this time in history. Perhaps a more immediate solution, to eliminate the manipulation experienced in the art trade, is for the artist to return to direct selling techniques. In this way artists, if they are honest, can take part in developing the art trade to suit art, rather than the market.

As Christopher Till said,

we live in a world of commodities, and art is a commodity in its financial value. However the actual production of art, the creativity that goes into it, that is far more spiritual and intellectual...great art isn't made if there isn't that kind of commitment. So I think art for art's sake, if that's the correct term, is there. The creative impulse is there, but it cannot survive if the sole object is to make it [art] commercially viable. However you cannot move away from the fact that great art is in danger of being manipulated by the manipulators: the dealers or the buyers or whoever. The producer of art is not necessarily part of that, but he/she gets caught up in the marketing of art.

Mr Till commented further:

There are those who are able to criticise the merit or demerits of artworks, which then establishes the artist's reputation, or doesn't. If someone comes up in exhibition after exhibition, and receives no acknowledgement from the critics, the serious art market is not going to consider them; although, they might well find a market amongst the picture - fabric - brigade. Strangely enough, one of the most successful artists in the country, financially, doesn't have a work in any art gallery in this country. He produces pot-boilers par excellence: he paints impasto flower pieces, and now he's doing sailing ships, and he asks R100 000 for a painting, and they're booked up before he paints them.

There is a market, an uninformed market, which has been able to be persuaded that these paintings are very important, and highly valuable - as with the wildlife artists who are seen by the mass as artists of note because they are so realistic. But at the end of the day, it's how good or how bad the work is. You'll find people who'll buy bad work, and there are artists who are hyped up who do receive overblown reputations.

Finally, I believe that, artists have a responsibility to art, to create images with honesty, and integrity; otherwise, the course of art is in danger of being shaped by everyone except artists. Certainly artists must respect their patrons' needs; but, at the same time, artists are obligated to developing public taste.

In turn the vision of artists must be respected (obviously not unconditionally - merit and quality must be present), rather than moulded by the public, and the dealers, and all those who influence art, and the market.

In essence: artists must be truthful to themselves, and truthful to their patrons, and cannot be swayed by outside influences, if great art is to continue being produced.

Our present society, and art market, does not always support, and encourage veracity; nevertheless artists must be tenacious, in order to overcome, and transcend the current climate, which clearly makes an already difficult job, even more arduous.

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