

# Art Museums in the Netherlands Creating Prophets

*A Research into the Decision-making Processes of Contemporary Art  
Museums in the Netherlands*

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I dedicate this thesis to my grandparents and uncle, who left us in the past year.

You have been my inspiration and motivation.

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## Abstract

This thesis investigates the selection process of Dutch contemporary visual art museums. It dives into the decision-making process of museums staff, who are the gatekeepers of the acquired artists. Curators, heads of collections and directors are confronted with three main challenges: oversupply of new artists, uncertainty about the quality of new artists and competition for artworks of top artists. By observing the whole decision-making process, this thesis reveals how museum staff come to a decision. They confront the challenges in different ways. For instance, the museums cooperate in a network and sub-networks, which are partially the result of a governmental cultural policy called Collection Nederland. This structuring mechanism increases the diversity of the collections, which decreases the isomorphism among the museums. However, it also leads to a higher synchronisation of the decision-making processes and thus, increases isomorphism on the level of the processes. The cooperation between the museums fades into the background when it comes to the top artists. Competition becomes the driving force in the decisions on popular artists. This thesis draws on the theory of neo-institutionalism and Bourdieu's field theory. The combination of the two theories proved to be a valuable aid to understand the decision-making processes in the field of cultural production.

**Keywords:** Contemporary Art Museums, Art Selection, Gatekeepers, Neo-Institutionalism, Bourdieu's Field Theory, Uncertainty

**Word count:** 22056

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Introduction of the topic

Museums are institutions that create social value for which they do not get any monetary value in return (Frey and Meier, 2006, p. 1022). Acquisitions and subsequently exhibitions are museums' media for expression, in which they can show the purpose they serve. The statements delivered in the exhibitions and acquisitions aim at particular audiences and the possible ways to educate them (Smithsonian Institution, 2002, p. 3). Museum directors have the decisive responsibility in decision-making and the long-term planning of exhibitions. The involvement of the directors depends on many factors such as their background and the size of the museum (2002, p. 3). Nevertheless, curators are often in charge of particular exhibitions and share the responsibility on what will be and will not be shown at the exhibitions. They travel around symposiums, galleries and museums in order to get an inspiration on the theme of the exhibition. Nowadays, museums often make use of a project team (head of collections, curator, etc.) in which the roles are distributed. Although in practice, the curators tend to naturally take over the leading role in exhibition planning (p. 6).

Museums also have permanent collections and not just temporary exhibitions. The choice to select an artwork starts to have strict consequences, because the acquisition is going to be a part of the museum for a long period of time. The disposal of artworks is not favoured, as every work of art is considered to be a unique expression of the artist, which makes the disposal inappropriate and unethical (Moustaira, 2015, p. 86). Thus, the decision-making process needs to be thought through in order to ensure that the artwork possesses the "required quality". The question that arises is on what basis these institutions select artists as valuable to become a part of their collection.

The selection is confronted with the issues of oversupply, and uncertainty from the lack of quality criteria. On the one hand, the abundance of artists poses a selection problem, because the museum staff need to filter through a vast amounts of artists (Kretschmer, Klimis and Choi, 1999, p. 62). In addition, the chance for the artists to be promoted by the museum is notably decreased, which highlights the gravity of the decision. On the other hand, museums are confronted with the need to make choices without having a universally applicable formula on what is "good" or "bad" art. Hence, the determination of quality is an essential dilemma in the cultural production (Hirsch, 1972). How do the gatekeepers in the market place pick the best artists?

In order to answer the research question on how do contemporary visual art museums in the Netherlands decide on what artworks to buy, I analyse the details of their decision-making process. More specifically, I examine fifteen contemporary art museums with a collection. These museums are working in the field of cultural production, which I understand from a neo-institutionalist and field theoretical perspective. To grasp the uncertainty of the selection procedure, I have decided to focus on contemporary art museums, because I argue that the selection process of new artists is more precarious than the one for already established artists. Contemporary artists who have not built their career yet need to find a way to prove the value of their work, because they do not benefit from the value gained by age like the Old Masters (Rodner and Thomson, 2013, p. 59). In contrast to contemporary art, the quality criteria for acquiring the Old Masters are clearer and more specific (Moulin, 1994, p. 6).

The challenging character of contemporary art makes its understanding and reception by the public complicated (Heinich, 2012, p. 700). This highlights the need for gatekeepers while it makes their role of mediating much harder. At its core, the role of gatekeepers consists of deciding which artists become part of the cultural field and as such are recognised as artists (Bourdieu, 1993, Janssen and Verboord, 2015, p. 441). Thus, the focus in this thesis is on mapping the practices of gatekeepers within the context of contemporary art museums. More specifically, it is the practice of decision-making and assigning value to the artworks. This focus on the gatekeepers as key players in the cultural field opens up various possibilities to understand and describe their actions. Museums as gatekeepers are indirectly influencing the art market by their selection of artists, which underlines the relevance of researching their practices (Velthuis, 2003, p. 471). Moreover, the decision-making process in the field of cultural production has a discursive component, as it is through a verbal strategy that gatekeepers show the legitimacy of their decisions (Bielby and Bielby, 1994, p. 1293).

Despite its importance, there is only little known about the process of selecting artworks and the criteria that the museums need to adopt in order to classify a certain work of art as good and suitable for the museum. The literature in the field can be effectively summarised in three sections. Firstly, it is centred on the sources of inspirations that help museums with the selection (Buskirk, 2012, Morgner, 2014). Then there is research on the general approach towards collecting and selecting art (Altshuler, 2007, Irvin, 2006, Storr, 2007). Lastly and more plentiful, there is literature focused on the perspective of the artist

and the steps that are taken in order to pursue the individual's future career after graduating at the art academy (Kerrigan and Rodner, 2014, Pasquinelli and Sjöholm, 2014, Rodner and Thomson, 2013). The material accessible on the selection process of art museums is often tailored to the specific institution and therefore it varies greatly. For example, the Smithsonian Institution (2002, p. 7) claims that the basic criteria for art selection include the relation of the artwork to museums' mission, value, fundability, accessibility of objects, and audience attraction. These basic requirements already raise multiple questions on the selection process. Which of these are the most important? How do museums balance the relation between intrinsic value of art and the limits of its funding?

The balancing of the named criteria, for instance, depends on whether the museum is funded publicly or privately (p. 8). The main difference between public and private museums lies in the type of governance that the museums use (Genoways and Lynne, 2003, p. 6). Public museums are under the power of governmental organisations, while private museums are controlled by private boards or firms (2003, p. 7). Public museums depend on public grants that are allocated to them in order to realise their mission and they have to keep their costs low (Frey and Meier, 2006, p. 1030). In general, publicly funded institutions strive to have the selection criteria transparent and they are often confronted by extra-textual (political) criteria such as audience participation (2006, p. 1030). In contrast, private museums receive income from the tickets sold and other facilities in the museum together with revenue from donors and sponsors, which marks income as a high priority (p. 1031).

The process of selecting art is explored through the perspective of neo-institutionalism and Bourdieu's field theory. Neo-institutionalists understand institutions as rooted in social and political spheres, connecting them to become a network created by their collective action (Rowan and Meyer, 1977, p. 360). Institutions are present in fields of different organisations and it is the institutional environment that imposes the homogeneity of institutions as prevalent (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). The limitation of neo-institutionalism can appear if it is assumed that the processes of the institutions happen without any form of contestation (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991, Franssen and Kuipers, 2013). Therefore, I include Bourdieu's field theory, because it considers competition as a primary issue of cultural production. Hence, the changes in the field are for Bourdieu a result of a conflict, instead of adjustments that stem from uncertainty (Bourdieu, 1996, Franssen and Kuipers, 2013).



Neo-institutionalism is suitable and applicable in this thesis for analysing the relation between the contemporary art museums in the Netherlands to see whether there is a common approach towards the selection of new artists caused by the museums' tendency to adapt. Consequently, the field theory of Bourdieu helps to understand other parts of the gatekeeping process in which there is, for instance, an appearance of competition. The choice of multiple theory framework advances the analysis, because "Organizational phenomena are much too complex to be described adequately by any single theoretical approach" (Tolbert, 1985, p. 12).

I combine the neo-institutional theory and field theory of Bourdieu to tackle the steps that the museum staff undertake in their decision-making process. The steps range from the initial approach to the artwork to the final decision for an acquisition. In all these stages, I analyse the practices by which the museum staff deal with the various factors, such as oversupply and uncertainty, which impact the process. I argue that the museum staff as gatekeepers have an important function in the cultural industries by deciding on what gets onto the market. I aim to illustrate that to fully grasp the decision-making process of contemporary visual art museums, it is crucial to take into account other institutions in the same field. The theoretical framework presents a series of hypotheses in order to give the study a more structured and clear direction.

## 1.2. The context: A short introduction to the cultural situation in the Netherlands

Knowing about the recent development of art museums is essential for understanding their current state and their future. As Buskirk (2012, p. 4) argues, it is not possible to talk about contemporary art without taking into account its current state of exhibition and distribution. The last few years were particularly fruitful in terms of the amount of newly emerging art institutions (Lorente, 2011, p. 1). Contemporary art museums are flourishing these days not only due to the vast amounts of art schools that produce new future artists. At the same time, there are programs teaching curators, academic researchers and critics that make sure this production of artists is securely contextualised (Buskirk, 2012, p. 2).

The recognition of collections as the basic element of museums is visible in the policy vision of the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science, Jet Bussemaker, who claims that collections are the ultimate centre of the stories that museums tell to the public (2013, p. 3). The variety of the collections and exhibitions that is characteristic for Dutch museums, contributes to the museums' high value in the cultural sector in the Netherlands (2013, p. 3).

Museums are important gatekeepers that connect the collection with the public. The role of Dutch museums is justifiably valuable in shaping the identity of Dutch and foreign citizens. Therefore, the responsibility of the museums becomes uncertain by the need to decide on the work that will be collected and the way it will be presented, in order to protect the integrity of the art while keeping in mind their influence on the visitors (Irvin, 2006, p. 150).

The involvement of the Dutch government in culture is predominantly based on the Cultural Policy Act, which has been the underlying foundation since 1993 (*The Dutch Cultural System*, 2013, p. 3). The cooperation between institutions together with the visibility of the collections, education, research and implementation of digital tools are crucial topics for current national cultural policy (Bussemaker, 2013, p. 2). The ministry assigns two million Euros to further these objectives (2013, p. 3). Hence, the aim is to allow the public to have access to the collections on a scope as large as possible. A vast amount of the collections should be made available in digital or physical form (p. 6). Essentially, if the space of the museum does not allow to display the majority of the works owned by the museum, it should cooperate with other Dutch museums and exchange those artworks or leave them available for a loan (p. 6). This idea is fostered through the digital Collection Nederland that has currently over 3.3. million objects. Its purpose is again to have the collection as accessible as possible<sup>1</sup>.

Dutch public museums that rely on governmental support receive a significant aid from the Mondriaan Fund, which provides financial help for the cultural sector. It focuses on subsidising all types of cultural projects or activities done by key cultural players such as artists, institutions or archives<sup>2</sup>. The yearly budget of the fund consists of 26 million Euros and the vast amount of that money is coming from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. In terms of museums, the support from the Mondriaan fund can be, for instance, in form of new acquisitions or in collaboration with another museum. More precisely, the foundation attributes to the museums a certain amount of money on a yearly or biennial basis<sup>3</sup>.

The recent developments and changes in the art museums, and the cultural sector in general, have been marked by cuts in subsidies. In the Netherlands, from 2012 to 2013 the subsidy cuts reached up to 238 million Euros (Siegal, 2013, n.p.). All in all, these changes

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<sup>1</sup> (“Over Erfgoed Digitaal / Collectie Nederland”, n.d.)

<sup>2</sup> (“Mondriaanfund – About”, n.d.)

<sup>3</sup> (“Mondriaanfund – About”, n.d.)

understandably caused the need to find a different forms of financial support through activities like fundraising, but more generally this had an impact on (not only) contemporary art museums' need to rethink their handling of finances (*The Dutch Cultural System*, 2013, p. 11). Thus, I expect that the museums scrutinised in this thesis will be influenced by the cuts. The impact might be in lower amount of acquisitions per year or in strengthening of museums' fundraising activities.

## 2. Theoretical framework

The literature on the decision-making process can be divided into three sections. Firstly, the literature highlights the different factors and actors involved in the process. For instance, the research of Morgner (2014) is focused on the decision-making process in art fairs and galleries. Through a network analysis, he explores the growth of art fairs and their relationship with galleries that take part in these fairs. This relationship reveals the factors influencing the decision-making on the quality of the artworks (2014, p. 44). Secondly, the literature approaches the selection process in contemporary art in a general manner. The research of Storr (2007) elaborates on the general issues connected to the acquiring of contemporary art. However, Storr analyses only one museum and he does not take into account the impact of the environment on the process of decision-making. Lastly, there is the vast amount of literature centred on the point of view of the artists promoting their works. Rodner and Thomson (2013) primarily focus on the steps that the artists need to take in the art world in order to become successful. In particular, their research discusses the various actors in the art market who create the value of the artist (2013, p. 59).

The material from the three sections provides valuable information on the central components of the selection process. Although none of these researches analyses the decision-making process of museum staff as gatekeepers to the artists. Storr's (2007) research analyses the acquisition process in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, but it is specifically tailored to this one museum. Hence, it is lacking a wider applicability by not taking into account other museums in the decision-making process. As Aldrich argued: "The major factor that organizations must take into account are other organizations" (1979, p. 265).

The theoretical framework is divided into three parts that are important to understand the concepts vital to decision-making in contemporary art museums. The first part explains the complexity of contemporary art and its collecting. It highlights the contradictions and strategies employed in contemporary collecting. Following that, I explain the field approach that is applied in this thesis. More specifically, I elaborate on the neo-institutional theory and Bourdieu's field theory to clarify the concepts and their relevance in this thesis. The last section takes under scrutiny museum staff as the gatekeepers of the artists. I analyse three main types of gatekeepers to see which one (if any) is the most suitable to be used in the context of museum staff. The theoretical framework ends with an analysis of the main sources of uncertainty that the gatekeepers face in the decision-making process.

## 2.1. Collecting contemporary art

### *Collecting contemporary art and its contradictions*

Museums possess the function to select artworks as a part of the collection, which marks the acquisitions as valuable objects. The key questions that museums face are what to collect, why, and how to display it after it is acquired. The ways museums answer these questions depend largely on the missions of the museums and changes in the cultural sphere (Buskirk, 2012, p. 41). The mission of the traditional art museum was to preserve the artworks that had proven to be worthy by time (Altshuler, 2007, p. 1). When it comes to contemporary art, the situation becomes slightly more complex, because it challenges the traditional setting of an art museum. This contradictory notion connected to collecting of contemporary art has been recognised by Gertrude Stein in the beginning of the 20th century, when she thought that something is either modern or it is a museum, however, it cannot be both simultaneously (2007, p.1). Museum staff of course still continue to make decisions on the quality of the artists, but when it comes to contemporary art it is more uncertain. Whenever contemporary artworks enter the museum sphere they become to be projected in the future, while becoming an important part in history (2007, p. 2).

The tasks of a museum of contemporary art can be seen as divergent due to its duty to maintain and guard cultural heritage and at the same time it is a venue for entertainment (Buskirk, 2012, p. 3). While the museum is active in creating art for contemporary times, it is protecting the art from the past and for the future (2012, p. 3). The exhibited artworks are considered to be so precious that its value cannot be measured, but at the same time the art institution needs to build up its collection and plan exhibitions, which is unavoidably linked to the monetary value of the artworks (p. 3). This can be projected to an artwork and its role on the market, because by selecting a contemporary artwork and giving it a price, one is estimating and betting on the future significance of the artwork (Altshuler, 2007, p. 2). Thus, the value of the artwork is no longer determined by its capability to withstand the test of time. Contemporary art is too recent to have gained the value by age (Moustaira, 2015, p. 8). I aim to show that contemporary artworks lack specific criteria determining their quality due to the above-mentioned uncertainties connected to contemporary collecting.

There are three different approaches to the collecting of contemporary art. The traditional way of collecting is referred to as *encyclopaedic*. It is characterised by collecting a vast amount of art that can be preserved for the future generations (Smithsonian Institution, 2005, p. 151). Hence, in encyclopaedic collecting the number of the artworks prevails. The

second type of collecting is called *representative and interpretive collecting*. This approach is characterised by collecting key artworks that are illustrative for a larger amount of artworks (2005, p. 152). These artworks should have such an identity that allows them to paint a bigger picture to the original story. The last approach to collecting is the development of *intellectual frameworks* that serve as a form of assessment to future acquisitions (p. 152). The creation of intellectual frameworks is difficult, because it includes several guiding points such as exhibition themes or availability in the storage. These factors are dependent on the mission of the museum. I formulate the following hypothesis based on the different approaches to the collecting of contemporary art:

***Hypothesis 1:*** Intellectual frameworks are used by the museums because of their flexibility.

### *The acquisition process*

Every art museum, may it be contemporary or focused on art from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, needs to select artists to create exhibitions and/or to complete its collection. Museums can acquire art from various resources such as auctions, galleries or straight from the artists. In the case of art museums, new art is usually acquired in smaller quantities due to the high price that is set for artworks (Smithsonian Institution, 2005, p. 142). The process of acquiring art can be a matter of long-term research and communication with the artist or a quick choice on spot (Rozell, 2014, p. 18). Some museums are collecting artists that have their names already established, while others focus on young artists who are in the beginning of their careers. Collecting also deviates in terms of following the artist's oeuvre (vertical collecting) or collecting main works of various artists (2014, p. 20).

The most common and easy way for museums to acquire artworks is through exhibitions (Smithsonian Institution, 2005). It allows the museums to physically see the artwork, while checking whether it fits the space of the museum. There is a pattern of reoccurring events that happen when a contemporary institution prepares for an exhibition and a future acquisition. The initial step is made by the curators, who start the connection with the artist in order to create a consensus on the display and safety of the artwork. The curators are centred on doing justice to the artwork while being constrained by diverse museum limitations such as the budget, the safety of visitors and the preservation of the artwork (Irvin, 2006, p. 145). Furthermore, conservators are also involved in this process, because their role is to make a report on every work that is in any relation obtained by the institution (2006, p. 146).

However, museums cannot rely on acquiring artworks solely from exhibitions. This can be due to limited exhibition space or budget issues (Smithsonian Institution, 2005). Thus, the decision-making process of contemporary art is influenced by various factors. Buskirk, for instance, argues that commercial art galleries are the main source of inspiration in terms of acquisitions (2012, p. 3). Art galleries function as the gatekeepers for the art market, because they also represent artists who enter the market right after graduating from the art college (Velthuis, 2003, p. 472). Art galleries represent an oeuvre of an artist for a longer period of time, because they want to establish a stable market in which the price for the artwork will grow (2003, p. 472). Thus, the galleries continuously draw the attention of cultural institutions such as museums, in order to spark their interest in involving one of the artists from the gallery in an exhibition or collection.

The art galleries get the attention of museums by, for instance, exhibiting their artists in art fairs, which belong to a common source of inspiration for the museums (Velthuis, 2013a). The rise of popularity of contemporary art fairs is attributed to the commercialisation and globalisation of the art world. Essentially, international art fairs connect art from different parts of the world, which enables the museum staff to “economize on search time for art” (Velthuis, 2013a, p. 370). Although, the international fairs have a negative effect on local artists who as a result become insignificant (Velthuis, 2013a).

Museums select artworks from several venues, but when it comes to the decision-making process the museum staff need to legitimise their decisions. The legitimacy is crucial, because “When a museum shows and purchases a work, it gives it the highest kind of institutional approval available in the contemporary visual arts world” (Becker, 1982, p. 117). The decisions made by museum staff are driven by a variety of reasons and concerns such as political, moral, commercial and aesthetics ones (Janssen and Verboord, 2015, p. 441). It is common that the motives behind the decisions are combined.

All in all, the decisions in cultural production need to be legitimised in order to stabilise the uncertainty that stems (not only) from the lack of quality criteria (Zelditch, 2001). The research of Bielby and Bielby (1994) demonstrates that the legitimation can be done through a number of strategies. Rhetorical strategies are characteristic in contexts where uncertainty dominates the field. The rhetorical strategies are, for instance, genre, fame or imitation (1994, p. 1293). I expect the museums analysed in this thesis to employ the

rhetorical strategies in order to legitimise their decisions. Consequently, I argue the following situation to be applicable:

**Hypothesis 2:** Because of the lack of quality criteria in the arts, museum staff will use rhetorical strategies to legitimise their decisions.

## 2.2. Neo-institutionalism and Bourdieu's field theory

Now that the contradictions and strategies in contemporary collecting are established, the field approach in decision-making is elaborated on. Neo-institutionalism and Bourdieu's field theory are used to see how museums cooperate in the cultural field by their choices of art for their collections and subsequently their exhibitions. Both theories share the idea of the field (such as museum acquisitions) to be a force that is restraining the agents and their actions (Dobbin, 2008, Franssen and Kuipers, 2013). The specific logic of the field is what leads the actions of the agents that play a role in it. Bourdieu and neo-institutionalists also share the concept that the field is to some extent autonomous from external forces (Bourdieu, 1983, DiMaggio and Powell, 1991).

Neo-institutionalists argue that organisational fields are structured by a culture of norms and values (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p. 946). The role of the institutions is recognised as shaping the circumstances in which actors take their decisions and expect other actors to act. Thus, to understand the decision-making process in the social world, the role of the institutions needs to be acknowledged (Alasuutari, 2015, p. 164). The term *social world* is used here as a reference to a type of a social organisation that cannot be fully grasped by spatial boundaries, but it encompasses the networks between institutions, their practices and interactions (Unruh, 1980, pp. 271-272).

The theory of neo-institutionalism acknowledges the environment of organisations as an open system (Selznick, 1996, p. 275). If contemporary art museums are to be understood as institutions with an open system, then according to neo-institutionalists we need to take into account the complex interactions with the environments they depend on (1996, p. 275). Hence, neo-institutionalists are concerned with the cooperation among organisations and they look at institutions as a coalition that is shaped by many rationalities and negotiated power (p. 275). The influence of institutions as social actors is not merely focused on individuals and their strategic plans, but rather on their rudimentary preferences. As Hall and Taylor claim: "The self-images and identities of social actors are said to be constituted from the institutional forms, images and signs provided by social life" (1996, p. 948). The stance



adopted by neo-institutionalists is in contrast to the idea that organisations have a tightly designed system, discipline or rationality (Selznick, 1996, p. 275). Bourdieu's field theory is a demonstration of this contrasting argument. He believed that institutions are highly specialised and fixed systems (1993). Therefore, I formulate two opposing hypotheses regarding the structure of the museums, which shapes their decision-making process:

***Hypothesis 3a:*** Contemporary art museums in the Netherlands have an open system, which leads to coordination within the museums in the field.

***Hypothesis 3b:*** Contemporary art museums in the Netherlands have a highly specialised and fixed system that forms their decision-making process.

### *Bourdieu's understanding of art as social in its nature*

Bourdieu thought that understanding a work of art is done through the examination of its production and reception together with its connection to the fields of power and relations in class (Bourdieu, 1983). Thus, art cannot exist completely autonomously, because it requires social interaction involving different cultural agents (Burnard, Trullson and Söderman, 2015, p. 144). For Bourdieu, society did not entail a set of individuals, but rather structures, relationships or links that are intertwined (Reid, 1998, p. 354). The space that these relationships form is divided into fields, for instance, the cultural field. Each of the fields can be split into sub-fields like the field of visual art that is positioned within the cultural field (1998, p. 354). This concept of Bourdieu is eminent as it underlines the role of museums and museum staff as gatekeepers, who through their mediation contribute to the existence of the artwork itself.

The institutions, people or the cultural products all have a particular standpoint in the cultural field, which is determined by their symbolic and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1996, Franssen and Kuipers, 2013). Bourdieu argues that this opposition between the two forms of capital is the underlying principle of the social world. In comparison to the approach of neo-institutionalists, Bourdieu (1996) claims that competition is the central logic in the fields of cultural production. In order to obtain a position of power, the agents compete in the art field. The struggle is determined by habitus, which are the dispositions of individuals that change the way we behave in various contexts (Bourdieu, 1996, Childress, 2015). The creation of such habitus occurs through a process of socialisation, which means that individuals are shaped by their social conditions and this is the reason why people from the same classes have their habitus alike (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 170). Subsequently, the struggles between the

agents, shape what constitutes a good work of art. Hence, the quality of art is more of a relative term for Bourdieu as it is largely determined by the art field.

Therefore, agents like directors and curators have similar habitus due to their comparable social conditions, which also defines their artistic taste. The aesthetic decisions of museum staff are in Bourdieu's field theory driven by the habitus and cultural capital. These decisions reduce uncertainty in the selection process, because they are expected to be driven instinctively (Bourdieu, 1993, Franssen and Kuipers, 2013). Accordingly, I expect the museum staff to have their decisions shaped by their habitus and cultural capital, which will make the decisions intuitive. Thus, I formulate a hypothesis on the decision-making process of museum staff:

***Hypothesis 4:*** The decisions of museum staff will be predominantly based on intuition.

#### *Changes among institutions: isomorphism and competition*

Bourdieu's field of cultural production is centred on the competing logics of different agents, while neo-institutionalists are focused on a singular standardising force (Childress, 2015, p. 4). The cultural field in which the institutions are found is understood by the neo-institutionalists as existent only to the degree by which it is defined by these institutions (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991, p. 65). This field grows over time, which leads to a standardisation of various institutional procedures gaining marginal importance (Childress, 2015, p. 3). In contrast to Bourdieu, neo-institutionalists argue that this results in the organisations of low influence starting to appear under pressure. As a consequence, they begin to look up to the institutions that are successful (2015, p. 3). Thus, the key factor that shapes the organisational development are the other organisations in the field (Aldrich, 1979).

The institutions operating in an uncertain field protect themselves by imitating other institutions. Museums might for example start imitating the choices for certain artworks that were done by other museums, in hope of gaining confirmation and prestige as an institution. This anomaly is referred to as mimetic isomorphism. The uncertainty often stems from the organisations facing a problem that cannot be easily solved, which results in the need to look for a quick solution with low expense (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991, p. 69). Nevertheless, the modelling of institutions according to the successful ones in the field can happen both consciously and unconsciously (1991, p. 69).

Moreover, the institutional change occurs through the structuration of the organisational fields that is stimulated by the state (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, p. 147-148).

When it comes to the Netherlands, the area analysed in this thesis, the structuration stimulated by the state can be projected on the promotion of Collection Nederland. All in all, the process of structuration requires the need for specialised gatekeepers who select from the abundance of production (Peterson and Anand, 2004). The abundance of production together with the market being less autonomous contribute to the need for gatekeepers like the museum staff. Hence, I expect the museum staff to face higher uncertainty in decision-making, given their highly relevant position as mediators of the artists while being under the pressure from the large quantity of the artists. I formulate the following two hypotheses based on the isomorphic changes in the field:

***Hypothesis 5:*** Contemporary art museums in the Netherlands have more diverse collections due to the structuration imposed on them by Collection Nederland.

***Hypothesis 6:*** Contemporary art museums in the Netherlands operate in an uncertain field which leads to an increased cooperation among the institutions.

The presence of several institutional logics within the fields, which are sometimes competing, is not fully explained by the neo-institutionalists, which is why I follow with Bourdieu's field theory that sheds light on these issues (Childress, 2015, Friedland and Alford, 1991, Thornton et al., 2012). Initially, it was Weber who argued that the structuration among organisations was caused especially due to the existing competition between firms in a marketplace and their aspiration for efficiency (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, p. 147). In similar way, Bourdieu understands competition as a driving force for change (Bourdieu, 1996, Dobbin 2008).

According to Bourdieu, the field of cultural production is centred on the contradictions between art and commerce. More specifically, it is driven by two opposing poles. On the one hand, it is the heteronomous principle, which is defined by economic and political domination. The production of art is then targeted to the art market in order to attain commercial wealth. This pole is characteristic for artworks of established artists that are dominating the art market. On the other hand, the autonomous principle is focused on artworks that are produced with purely artistic intentions for the sake of autonomy and recognition, such as art for art's sake (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 216, Childress, 2015, p. 4). Essentially, these two principles are the underlying basis of struggles between agents who either want to preserve or change the recognised relations of power to make the most of their position (Maton, 2005, p. 690).

The existence of the two conflicting principles contributes to the historical emergence of two opposing subfields. One is centred around large-scale production, while the other deals with restricted production. The former is in line with the heteronomous principle. It is characterised by aiming at large audiences and the production is focused on making a profit. Hence, the target of this principle is the so called mass culture (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 320). In terms of acquisitions, these would be the works of art that are known as *blockbusters*. Their mission is to attract a wider spectre of audiences to come to the museums. The latter is following the autonomous principle and it is characterised by its relative freedom from the economic field. The production in it is focused on other producers or a limited audience (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 333). Museums in this case appear to be relatively independent from the market and they select artists that are not established. This leads to the acquisitions being more concerned with a specific public.

Furthermore, the success in the field of restricted production depends on the symbolic capital of the members in the field (Bourdieu, 1983). The growth of this field results in an increase of its autonomy from the field of power, which follows with inversion of the basic principles of all basic economies, because artistic success is measured by as little dependency on the market as possible (1983, p. 320). In other words, works of art that become economically successful are seen as works that are compromising their artistic value in exchange for monetary value. Museums striving to acquire expensive artworks that are dominant on the market are in Bourdieu's theory compromising the intrinsic value of the art.

I expect the museums to be primarily following the autonomous principle in order to comply with the intrinsic value of art. Hence, the museum staff are likely to have a high symbolic capital that allows them to make choices through which they do not consecrate the value of art. However, in contrast to Bourdieu, I take into account that the museums have a limited budget that does not allow them to acquire only established artists. Hence, it is the price of the artworks that will matter, not only their value. The research of Heilbrun and Gray (2001) confirms that it is impossible for museums to keep up with the prices of artworks on the art market. Based on these expectations I formulate the following hypothesis:

***Hypothesis 7:*** Contemporary art museums in the Netherlands follow the autonomous principle (Bourdieu) for the sake of the intrinsic value of art and due to limited budget.

### 2.3. Gatekeepers and the uncertainty in the art market

#### *Gatekeepers and their role*

The root characteristic of gatekeepers is acting as mediators between the spheres of production and consumption (Hesmondhalgh, 2006, Maguire and Matthews, 2014, Negus, 2002). Gatekeepers have been pervasively discussed in sociology in terms of smaller cultural industries such as graphic design, but when it comes to greater artistic activities like visual arts, the responsibility of gatekeepers tends to be overlooked (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 327, Heinich, 2012, p. 696). Thus, I argue that understanding the gatekeeping process is pivotal as sheds light on the way the artistic value is created.

Curators, head of collections and directors are gatekeepers who deal with people from the field of cultural production and their role lies in deciding on which artist will become a part of the collection. The responsibility of museum staff as gatekeepers can be characterised as “treating and framing the things as work of art, insuring it, describing it, selling or exhibiting it, lighting it, commenting it” (Heinich, 2012, p. 696). They collectively contribute to the establishment of an artist in the cultural field. This way their role lies in the production of symbolic value. However, the gatekeeping process is also contradictory in its nature. In principal, the goal of the museum staff is to spread the works of the artists to the audiences and thereby create a demand. At the same time, the result of their selection is the strengthening of the cultural capital and the status of the artists and their work (Featherstone, 1991, p. 19).

The current situation of contemporary art can be described with gatekeepers becoming more dominant and art being autonomous (Heinich, 2012, p. 699, Bourdieu, 1992). Featherstone explains the rising need for gatekeepers is a response to the growing supply of symbolic goods (1991, p. 19). Thus, the abundance of artworks leads into art primarily being a matter for specialists, which brings art further from amateurs or the general public (2012, p. 699). I expect the oversupply to affect the gatekeeping role of museum staff in a similar way as in hypothesis two. Thus, I assume that the abundance of artworks makes the gatekeeping process more uncertain. This results in an even higher need for museum staff to legitimise their decision with rhetorical strategies.

### *Three main types of gatekeepers*

The literature on gatekeepers offers three main directions that define the role of gatekeepers as: co-producers, tastemakers and selectors (Foster, Borgatti, and Jones, 2011, p. 248).

Gatekeepers that closely follow the artist and the artwork during the process of creation are called co-producers. For instance, museum staff that work truly close with the artist or accept artworks on commission, could be seen as gatekeepers that are simultaneously the co-creators of the value of the artwork. Secondly, the gatekeepers as tastemakers come into play after the production process. Their task is to evaluate the artwork and present it to the audiences (Foster et al., 2011). Museums are close to this type of a gatekeeper when it comes to the process of acquiring new artists. Lastly, the gatekeeper as a selector is in line with the definition by Gould and Fernandez “gatekeeping occurs when an actor selectively grants outsiders access to members of his or her own group” (1989, p. 92).

The second type of gatekeepers as tastemakers is related to the discourse of the new petite bourgeoisie in Bourdieu’s *Distinction* (1984). In this work, Bourdieu focuses on the social categorisation of people and its reproduction and legitimation through consumption of the taste (Bourdieu, 1984, Maguire and Matthews, 2014, p. 16). Essentially, the new petite bourgeoisies can be classified as a new social class that has particularly characteristic tastes and cultural practices “in all occupations involving presentation and representation and in all the institutions providing symbolic goods and services” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 359). Hence, when discussing museum staff as gatekeepers one can refer to them as selected tastemakers that have the power to regulate value.

Gatekeepers as people that are determining taste fall under a segment of economy, which demands the construction of consuming tastes and dispositions (Maguire and Matthews, 2014, p. 15). Bourdieu regarded this segment of economy as a new economy, which is dependent on the production of needs and consumers, but also on the production of goods (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 310). The need for gatekeepers in the new economy arises from the demand for the production of needs (1984, p. 369). Thus, museums are the creators of taste through their selection of acquisitions. At the same time, they are dependent on the production of the artworks to be able to continue fulfilling role as gatekeepers.

To fully understand Bourdieu’s concept of gatekeepers as taste makers, it is necessary to grasp it as social in its nature. Bourdieu argues that taste is determined by social origin, for instance, by one’s position in class or educational background (1984, p. 56). In this sense, he

differentiates between three types of taste that could be seen as correspondent to the educational level and social classes. Firstly, it is the legitimate taste, such as the appreciation for high art that is characteristic for the higher classes in monetary and educational terms (Boorsma, 2006, p. 81). Secondly, it is the middlebrow taste that is associated with the middle classes. It encompasses minor works of the major art (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 16). Lastly, it is the popular taste that is frequent among the working classes and it includes light music or popularised classical music (1984, p. 16).

The social nature of taste leads to the creation of different groups that are formed on the basis of the preference of taste. The determination of taste is done through the negotiation of the different groups that seek a confirmation of their social position (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 56). Hence, taste is a matter of the classification of oneself and by others (1984, p. 56). Thus, museum staff are forming a group of people that fall under the category of legitimate taste. Their backgrounds are much alike as they are mostly active in art history and curating.

In the terminology of Bourdieu, the gatekeepers are considered to be a considerably smaller group in comparison to the development of the term that occurred since then (Maguire and Matthews, 2014, p. 2). He argued that the most typical gatekeepers are “the producers of cultural programmes on television or radio or the critics of ‘quality’ newspapers and magazines and all the writer-journalists and journalist-writers” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 325). Clearly, this is not the case anymore, because the definition has been broadened since then, as it is evident from the discussion above. Following Bourdieu’s lead, Maguire and Matthews (2014, p. 2) claim that the term gatekeepers should include a wider spectre of work. They construct a broader definition in which gatekeepers are agents that create value through the process of mediating the recognition and engagement of goods with others. They are defined by their expertise in creating the value and taste in a particular cultural sphere (2014, p. 2). In other words, in today’s world gatekeepers are the taste makers with expertise who determine what can be considered as a matter of good taste and culture, which is in line with the role of the museum staff.

This section analysed three main types of gatekeepers. I expect the museum staff to be acting only in rare circumstances as gatekeepers as co-producers. I suppose that gatekeeping as co-producers occurs in situations that are not a matter of daily practice in terms of the decision-making process. For instance, artworks on commission or close collaborations with

the artists. However, I assume that the most suitable type of gatekeepers for museum staff are the gatekeepers as taste makers. I therefore formulate the following hypothesis:

***Hypothesis 8:*** The gatekeeping role of museum staff is characterised as taste makers.

### *Uncertainty in the art market*

The decision-making process of museums valorises artworks. Through acquisitions obtained by private or public funds, museums choose to either confirm the trends on the market or to create their own (Moulin, 1994, p. 10). Thus, the artworks collected by the museum to some extent establish its credibility. This way the artworks retroactively contribute to the visibility of the museum.

Museum staff are operating in a cultural field that is risky and uncertain (Moulin, 1994). This thesis scrutinises the uncertainty which museums encounter in the decision-making process. I expect this uncertainty to stem from five sources. Firstly, the pricing process of the artworks is ambivalent. The quality of the artworks should be correspondent with the price, which is difficult to achieve (Morgner, 2014, p. 39). Secondly, the working hours on the artwork or the material used cannot be estimated and even if it is possible it does not match the value of the artwork (2014, p. 39). These two points of uncertainty can be linked back to Bourdieu's argument on the tension between art and commerce that was mentioned in the previous chapter (1992). In other words, the uncertainty in these points stems from the complexity of symbolic goods in which success is determined by the intrinsic value of the goods.

The third source of uncertainty of contemporary art is determined by the position of the artist in the art world (Velthuis, 2013b, p. 301). The uncertainty of the artistic and economic value in contemporary art is significantly reduced after it is marketed through a well-known gallery or auction (2013, p. 301). Hence, the artist that was not consecrated by the art market represents a risky acquisition for the museums (Bourdieu, 1993). The higher degree of risk also applies for the galleries that take the initial step by promoting the artist before he or she becomes exhibited in the museum (Velthuis, 2013b, p. 301). The fourth and the most common source of uncertainty in cultural industries results from the large amount of produced cultural goods (Franssen and Kuipers, 2013, Peterson and Anand, 2004). According to Menger, the overabundance of artworks stems from the sorting mechanism on which the art market is built (1999, p. 569). In other words, there are only selected gatekeepers such as the museum staff who decide from the oversupply whether an artwork is valuable or not



while they need to operate with ambiguous criteria determining the quality of visual art. The result of the sorting mechanism is overabundance of less talented artists and shortage of the talented ones (1999, p. 569). The last source of uncertainty is part of the mechanism and it comes from the deficiency of unambiguous quality criteria (Janssen and Verboord, 2015, p. 440).

I argue that the last two sources of uncertainty are particularly challenging. The sorting mechanism defined by Menger (1999) shows that the overabundance of artists persists over longer period of time. This impacts the decision-making process, which becomes harder, longer and limiting the possibility to be accepted as an artist. Moreover, the quality criteria in contemporary art are often contradictory in their nature. For instance, one of the widely recognised criteria is that the artist needs to live long in order to produce a recognisable oeuvre (Heinich, 2012). However, in contemporary art the artist is in most of the cases too young to possess an oeuvre that has been developed through his whole life, which makes this criterion impossible to be met. Darby and Karni (1973) refer to this type of goods as “credence goods”. This term includes goods in which the quality is determined by what other people think (Kretschmer et al., 1999, p. 63).

The gatekeepers mainly cope with uncertainty in two ways. First, the actors try to decrease the uncertainty by connecting with others that have the same issues. This leads to the museums being in a state of competitive awareness (White, 2005, p. 2). The awareness can lead either to the museums imitating the selection process of each other or on the contrary, they try to be as different as possible (White, 1981). This way of coping with uncertainty resembles the theory of mimetic isomorphism that was described in the previous section of this thesis. Mimetic isomorphism specifically focuses on museums imitating each other to decrease uncertainty (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983).

Secondly, personal contact with the artists helps in decreasing the uncertainty. In particular, it is reduced by face to face communication with the artists (Velthuis, 2013a). Some forms of art even require a continuous cooperation with the artist on the project destined for the museum, which coins the museum as a co-creator (Buskirk, 2012, p. 17). This collaboration with an artist and a museum is often so close and intense that the museum shapes the features of the work (Irvin, 2006, p. 145).

This section shed light on the five main sources of uncertainty. I expect in my research that all five sources will be present in the decision-making process. However, I

assume that the last three criteria will be particularly significant in the process. The third criterion on emerging versus established artists is captured in the seventh hypothesis where I argue that museums collect emerging artists due to budget limitations and for the sake of intrinsic value of art. The fourth criterion on uncertainty in quality is encompassed in the second hypothesis where I claim that the museums do not operate with clear quality criteria. Therefore, based on the last criterion I formulate the following hypothesis:

***Hypothesis 9:*** Contemporary art museums in the Netherlands have to face uncertainty in their decision-making process, which stems from the overabundance of artists in the art market.

## 3. Method

### 3.1. Sampling: contemporary art museums in the Netherlands

According to the Museum Server<sup>4</sup>, the Netherlands is home to 949 museums of which 267 are focused on art. However, the search engines do not differentiate between modern and contemporary art. Hence, through my research I have found 29 museums that are focused on visual contemporary art and have a collection. I approached all of the museums that match this description. Out of the 29 museums I have managed to interview fifteen museums.

This thesis examines visual contemporary art museums with a collection. As described in the theory, collecting is the basic element attributable to a museum. Thus, the selection is based on this uniting element between the institutions, because museums with collections need to select new artists that will become a part of the museum for a long time. The museum staff feel the true commitment towards the public, which is why the disposal of the artworks evokes discomfort (Smithsonian Institution, 2005, p. 164). This confirms the value given to the acquisition of an artist.

The Netherlands is suitable for this thesis due its amount and variety of contemporary art museums and because it is intriguing to see how their methods behind art selection might differ (Noordegraaf and Vermeulen, 2010). The Netherlands is a small country which allows to get a good sample of contemporary art museums. As mentioned in the previous chapters, museums are a pivotal part of the cultural sector in the Netherlands (Bussemaker, 2013, p. 2). Bussemaker stresses the importance of museums as institutions that shape our knowledge, create appreciation for our history and form our identity (p. 2). Hence, the emphasis that is laid on the museum sector in the Netherlands is essentially connected to the importance of this research. In other words, investigating the value creation that is in the hands of the museum staff is fundamental, when being aware of the influence that museums have (not only) on the Dutch society.

### 3.2. Data collection: semi-structured interviews

For the purpose of testing the hypotheses that were presented in the theoretical framework, I explore the field of cultural production. In order to gain the information about the decision-

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<sup>4</sup> (Museum Server, *Type Collectie*, n.d.)

making process I conduct a qualitative research. According to Holliday (2007, pp. 5-9), qualitative research is characterised by looking deep into the societal situation by going directly into the field. The thesis is based on qualitative research as it includes collecting, analysing, and interpreting data by observing what people do and say. Hence, the nature of semi-structure interviews allows one to get an insight into the practice of the museum staff. The advantage of semi-structure interviews is the possibility to conduct the interviews in a conversational manner. This way, the interviewee has the freedom to discuss the necessary topics that can arise during the interview without having it strictly prepared (Longhurst, 2010, p. 103).

I have conducted fifteen interviews in fifteen different museums that collect visual contemporary art. The interviews provide useful information about the main pillars of the decision-making processes of new artists and the policies of the museums. In particular, I interviewed four curators, seven heads of collections and four directors, in order to find out more about the decision-making process. The selection of the interviewees was based on their responsibility and availability. The interviewees typically had a university degree in art history or curating. The respondents consist of nine females and six males, who were in their middle ages.

The interviews were all conducted face to face with one exception that was over the phone. The duration of the interviews spans in time from forty minutes to one and a half hours. Thus, a typical interview lasted for one hour. With the interviews, I have covered all the regions in the Netherlands and eight out of twelve provinces. The data is stored in form of recordings and interview transcripts. The research period of the interviews was between March and May 2016. The interviews are the main source of information, which is also a limitation of this thesis. I do not particularly take into account the policy documents, because they are written in Dutch. Where needed I asked for help in translation. Another limitation is the time frame in which this thesis was conducted, because that did not allow to interview all 29 visual contemporary art museums with a collection in the Netherlands.

### 3.3. Operationalisation

The research question in this thesis is how contemporary visual art museums in the Netherlands decide on what artworks to buy. The aim of this study is to uncover the details of the processes behind the selecting of new artists in contemporary art museums in the Netherlands. Currently, the literature available on this topic is lacking a detailed insight into

this topic. The material in this field is very specific to particular institutions without examining the connections among them. Hence, the aim of this thesis is to take a deeper look into the selection process while uncovering the potentially existing connections between the institutions that influence this process. By creating a theoretical framework of neo-institutionalism and Bourdieu's field theory, the process of selecting new artists will shed light on the associations between the institutions. This helps to see whether the relations between the institutions generate the circumstances in which actors make their decisions (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p. 946). Moreover, this study attempts to see whether the art organisations in the Netherlands operate in the field as homogeneous institutions.

The goal of the interviews was to gather information on the decision-making process of the museums. The study was introduced to the participants as a research that is focused on the selection process of contemporary art museums and on the basis the museum staff make the decisions. Additionally, it was explained to the interviewees that the research is focused on contemporary art that is considered to be uncertain in terms of the decision-making process. The order of the questions was the following. It started with questions on the focus of the collection. Further, I inquired about the values taken into account during the selection process. Lastly, there were questions on examples of recent acquisitions and the uncertainty of contemporary art.

### 3.4. Data analysis

This thesis used "an instrumental case study" according to Robert E. Stake to analyse the data. Stake (1995) describes this type of analysis as a research of case studies for a generalizable purpose. In terms of my research, I interviewed fifteen museum staff (case studies) that provide me with information on a generalizable matter (decision-making). I do not study the museum staff to learn about their particular work, but rather to gain information to advance the understanding of a specific issue. Simons (1996, p. 231) refers to this as the paradox of a case study, because: "By studying the uniqueness of the particular, we come to understand the universal." Thus, by analysing the practices of the museum staff as a representative for contemporary visual art museums, I aim to explain the decision-making process to make its purpose generalizable for similar institutions in the cultural field.

This thesis made use of software for qualitative data analysis called Atlas.ti. It was utilised to code the interviews in order to see the relations between each of the fifteen interviews. Firstly, I thematically coded the interviews. After that, the single codes (690)

were grouped into twenty-three families according to their uniting elements. The families, such as “quality” or “selection” were beneficial for writing the results, because they allowed for quick allocation of the needed parts in the interviews.

The quotes in this thesis have been anonymised at my interviewee’s request. Thus, I have assigned each of the museums a pseudonym, such as “museum 1”, “museum 2” and so forth, irrespective the order of the museums mentioned in the table below. In addition to the pseudonym, I use the interviewees’ position in the museum.

### 3.5. List of the museums analysed in this thesis

No.	Museum	Type of the institution and funding	Size of the museums defined by respondents
1.	De Hallen	Public	Small
2.	Van Abbe	Public	Small
3.	De Pont	Private	Small
4.	JVDT	Private	Small
5.	Stedelijk Amsterdam	Public	Big
6.	Stedelijk Den Bosch	Public	Small
7.	Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen	Hybrid	Big
8.	Huis Marseille	Private	Small
9.	GEM	Public	Big
10.	Museum Arnhem	Public	Small
11.	Nederlands Fotomuseum	Public	Big
12.	Centraal Museum in Utrecht	Public	Small
13.	Museum Belvedere	Private	Small
14.	Museum Vleeshal	Public	Small
15.	Museum de Fundatie	Public	Small

## 4. Results

This chapter explores the data that was collected from the interviews and it tests the hypotheses from the theoretical framework. The findings are analysed through a narrative interpretation of the selection process. As a result of my study, I found seven parts that serve as the main pillars in the selection process adopted by the examined museums. Firstly, I introduce the uncertain market in which the museums operate and the crucial choice between being trend-setters or trend-followers. Then I elaborate on where the museums find their artists, followed by the reasons why the museum staff consider particular artists to be of high quality. The fourth part is about the cooperation and competition among the museums in the cultural field. The next stage deals with the selection process in light of the budget limitations. In the sixth point, I describe the legitimization of museums' decisions, which are subsequently in the final stage given an approval or dismissal. It is important to note that the selection process is not hierarchical. It is not a matter of a predestined period of time in which the museums decide which artists are valuable for the museum. All of the parts are essential stages, which shape the selection process.

### 4.1. Uncertain market: collecting established versus emerging artists

The museums examined in this thesis operate in an uncertain market where they are exposed to various pressures. I have come across two main approaches in the selection process that stem from the uncertainty in the art market. Museum staff have the choice to either select artists that have their name to certain extent established in the art market, or they can choose to acquire emerging artists whose value has not been proven by the market. Before I elaborate on these choices more in detail, it is important to note that all of the museums scrutinised in this thesis make use of both approaches. However, what differs here is the dominance of one approach over the other. Furthermore, the selection between the two streams can be done both consciously and unconsciously. On the one hand, the interviewees agreed that it is nearly impossible to follow a completely different path than the one set by the trends. This is because the trends stipulate the market, which further influences the artworks that get to the fairs, biennales or galleries. On the other hand, the museum staff claim that their expertise is their conscious and protective mechanism against the trends. As these two quotes illustrate, there is a visible tension:

I need to follow the trends. I think that's very necessary (Curator, Museum 12).

We're absolutely not sensitive to trends, you don't pick based on trends if you know you want to collect this artist for 25 years. Then you're stuck with something that's going to be outdated in a bit. So that's never the mentality, so no trends in that sense (Curator, Museum 4).

I elaborate on the two different approaches to collecting more in detail. The approach that relies on established artists will be referred to as “the secure approach”, while “the risky approach” applies to the collecting of emerging artists. In the secure approach, the museum staff judge the artwork on the basis of its “good stance” in the market. The secure approach represents a strategy of the museums to avoid risks. Thus, museums adopting this logic are responding to the uncertainty, which is characteristic for cultural production (Bielby and Bielby, 1994). The quality criteria in contemporary art are not clearly defined, which leads the museum staff to buy artworks that are well-known. The selection of established artists grants the museums the immediacy of recognition (Ahlkvist and Fisher, 2000). Here, well-known becomes an equivalent for quality. In Bourdieu’s (1993) terms, the artists have been *consecrated*, because they have been established by the agents and institutions in the field of cultural production. The consecration of artworks decreases the uncertainty both in terms of economic and artistic value (Velthuis, 2013b, p. 301).

We are trying to collect things that immediately fit with our collection.... That means that we are buying things that are already proven (Head of collections, Museum 13).

We do not buy directly from Rijksacademie or we do not buy directly...from the ateliers. They need to have some sort of establishment (Head of collections, Museum 3).

The museums opting for the secure approach do not consider themselves as a platform where the artists start their career, but rather a final destination. Thus, the museum staff give precedence to the popularity of the artist over the creativity, which is characteristic for highly institutionalised contexts such as the museum sphere (Bielby and Bielby, 1994). This was noted by the interviewees:

Interviewer: Do you also collect emerging artists?

Curator: We are absolutely not there. We are not doing charity, we don't help people, we show artists that we believe that have exceptional quality in the work, that's the function (Curator, Museum 4).



Even though the secure approach provides the museum staff with higher certainty in terms of success of the artworks, the acquisition of it becomes more expensive. This prevents many museums from strictly following this approach. Instead, they turn to the risky approach. Through the interviews, I have come across two main reasons for the museums to decide for the latter approach. Firstly, and most extensively, the museum staff put the artistic value upfront. They look for what is new and creative, because they believe that their role is to discover the talents and hence be the trend-setters. The interviewees often passionately argued that their goal is to map the current world, and young and emerging artists are the ones who can express the contemporary feeling through their artworks the most accurately. These quotes illustrate:

Yes, for us I think it's rather the other way around normally. We try to find the new big names and we hope they will become bigger in the future (Director, Museum 10).

Part of a programming is being ahead of the curve, you know, seeing the emerging talent and getting there first (Curator, Museum 14).

The interviewees acknowledged the power that they have as an institution in the cultural field. The museum staff attempt to be the ones who find and establish “the big names” before the artists appear in another museum. Competition appears to be the drive to gain cultural legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1996). In other words, the museums are competing to be the ones who consecrate the artworks first in order to rise the importance of the museum as an institution. One of the reasons to make innovative and thus risky choices is connected to having a strong mission. As confirmed in the research of Godart and Mears (2009, p. 678), this is often the case when the agents attempt to be innovative or have an “edgy” look.

I think it's complicated to buy a very young artist if you don't really know what's going to happen (Head of collections, Museum 2).

It's sometimes a risk... and you think somebody can develop into something that you think is interesting and then maybe 5 years later you see it was there then, but it didn't develop (Director, Museum 5).

The risky approach increases the possibility of uncertainty as illustrated in the quotes above. In contrast to the secure approach, the museum staff are exposed to a higher chance of failure. There is no certainty on whether the artist becomes popular in the field or whether the oeuvre of the artist develops in order to become a more substantial part of the collection.

The interviewees often hesitantly mentioned the price as the second reason for acquiring emerging artists. The price for unknown artists is very low, which allows the museums to purchase a bigger variety of artworks. However, these claims are often immediately followed by an assertion about the artistic value of the artworks to show that the low price is not the leading principle. Thus, through the interviews I got the feeling that the museum staff feel the need to legitimise their choices as important gatekeepers in the cultural field. In addition, public museums centred on emerging artists consider it as unethical to spend the taxpayers' money on artworks that are too expensive for the museum to acquire:

And they just [private collectors] bid against each other and I think...this is too much for museums. I think it's really problematic to spend so much money from the taxpayers from the country for these kind of acquisitions and there are a lot of artists that we think are super important and making beautiful works and are not that expensive (Head of collections, Museum 6).

Well the difficult thing is that art has become a very expensive thing to buy once artists are established. And the art market is really, very strange phenomenon. I mean art becomes extremely expensive and too expensive for museums to buy (Head of collections, Museum 11).

In the theoretical framework I discussed the third source of uncertainty as determined by the position of the artists on the market. This section highlighted that established artists have indeed a decreased level of uncertainty, because the artists were already marketed. In contrast, the emerging artists represented a higher degree of risk. The two different approaches to collecting are a demonstration of Bourdieu's argument on the field of cultural production as concentrated on the contradiction between art and commerce (1992). The secure approach is similar to Bourdieu's heteronomous principle, in which the production of art is focused on gaining commercial wealth over artistic value. As illustrated before, it is the museums' response to the uncertainty in the art market that stems from lack of quality criteria. While the risky approach is in line with the autonomous principle where the artworks are acquired primarily for the intrinsic values of art (Bourdieu, 1992). However, in contrast to Bourdieu's argument, the museum staff collect the emerging artists also due to the size of their budget, not only for intrinsic reasons. Hence, the seventh hypothesis is confirmed.

## 4.2. Finding artists

### *Venues with artists*

The first step that the museums undertake in their process of acquiring new artworks is to map the artistic field to see which artists would be an enrichment to their collection. The choice to visit one venue and not another is closely tied with the mission of the museums. It determines their status as it simultaneously coins their approach towards art as such. I have come across six sources where museums find artists. The venues are used by the museums to varying degrees. The sources are auctions, art fairs and biennales, galleries, artistic studios, academy presentations and online documentations. Thus, in this section I describe these six sources to indicate the different reasons for choosing a particular venue.

Auctions are the least favourable approach to find artists. The museums substantiate the hostility with the impersonal approach in auctions. Catalogues are the main medium through which the museum staff can read about the artists and their artworks. The actual visit of the auctions is a matter of attempting to buy the artwork previously chosen in the catalogue. Thus, the museum staff miss the possibility to familiarise with the artists.

When it comes to visiting of biennales and fairs, all of the museums have it as a part of their routine. It is a matter of the whole museum team, may it be the curators, head of collections or directors, to go to fairs. The museum teams often visit fairs without the purpose of buying art, because the interviewees consider knowing what is happening in the art world as an important part to fulfil their role of gatekeepers. In addition, it is a good opportunity for the museum staff to be visible and thus promote the represented museum.

I think it's very important to go to fairs of course, to get always bit of a feeling what's happening (Head of collections, Museum 8).

So you have to do a lots of reading lots of visiting shows lots of visiting fairs, so you just see a lot and you have to inform yourself a lot and out of that you see whether something is less or more interesting (Director, Museum 5).

These quotes illustrate that visiting fairs is favourable for the museum staff, because they can improve their knowledge on the artists available in the art world. In contrast to the auctions, in fairs the museum staff have the possibility to discuss the artwork that sparked their interest. Moreover, the museum teams visit both international and national art fairs. Even museums that only collect national artists go to international ones, because they want to broaden their

scope and see how their collection relates to the international collection. In the theoretical framework, I discussed the negative impact of international fairs on local artists who become insignificant (Velthuis, 2013a). However, this was not recognised by the museum staff. In every museum, whether focused on international or national artists, they highlighted the need to be aware of what is happening in the close area of the museum. Local artists were not considered as insignificant, but rather the opposite. The museum staff described that collecting of local artists is a responsibility of every museum.

The prevalent way to explore the art market and find artists for the collection of the museums is by visiting galleries. However, galleries also belong to a very disputable area. The perspective on finding artists in galleries is equally divided among the museums. Firstly, the museums admit the relevance of the galleries, but they do not agree on strictly following them as trend-setters. The reason for the gallery visit is primarily to broaden their knowledge about artists. Even though they also acquire artworks in galleries, they do not accept it to be a leading principle. They prefer to acquire directly from the artist after seeing the work in a gallery. When I asked the interviewees why this is the case, they stated that part of their gatekeeping role is to find the artists on their own. One of the interviewees noted,

Sometimes, I also like very much to go somewhere where you wouldn't expect it and then you see something very brilliant.... Some museums want the brand of the gallery on it, it has to be proven, so it's not really daring (Head of collections, Museum 13).

Thus, in the first perspective the museum staff strive to fulfil their role as gatekeepers and trend-setters, instead of solely accepting what is offered by other agents in the field. In the theoretical framework, I explored the autonomous principle of field by Bourdieu (1983) and here it is demonstrated by the museums putting an emphasis on the intrinsic value of art. Like in the case of the choice for emerging artists, the museum staff rely on their own search instead of merely accepting art presented by galleries. In addition, this also partially confirms the seventh hypothesis.

Secondly, the museum staff develop a close relationship with the galleries and thereby go along with the artworks offered to them. In contrast to the previous perspective, the museums here rely on acquisitions offered by the trend-setters. They do this because only through a close relationship it is possible to get to some of the artworks earlier than the other museums. Thus, the conjunction with the galleries helps the museums to be a step closer to the “top” artists promoted by the art galleries (Moulin, 1986). The museum staff believe that

this approach helps them to be ahead of the market. However, in Bourdieu's terms, the museum staff consecrate the value of art. Even though the museums want to be ahead of the market, they strongly rely on the galleries, which makes them less autonomous (Bourdieu, 1983). This quote illustrates that museums in the second perspective strongly believe in the choices set by the galleries:

But for new works you just have to live with the list of the galleries, they are the specialists setting the prices and you always try to talk that down and sometimes that is more successful. But they exactly know what is successful (Head of collections, Museum 3).

Studio visit is often the next step after the initial discovery of the artist in a fair or a gallery. It helps the museum staff to get to know the artist on a professional level. However, it is also time-consuming to visit each of the desired artists in the studio. This is particularly the case when the museum staff go directly to the studios to find artists without any previous contact. Even though the visit costs time, the interviewees consider studio visit as a good way of finding artists. When I asked the interviewees why this is the case, they zealously stated that they enjoy to witness the artistic process and follow the artistic development. In addition, it helps them to see whether the oeuvre of the artist still matches the collection of the museum. In the theoretical framework I discussed personal contact as a way to cope with uncertainty. Thus, a face to face communication increases certainty in acquisitions:

I think that with most artists it's important that we meet them, talk to them, see their studios, and get to know their artistic process (Head of collections, Museum 11).

So before I am convinced to buy this one beautiful work I have to know how is the rest of the work going to be developed and when I see it's not a really serious artist then...it's because it's somehow an investment, not only in one art piece, but also in an artist (Curator, Museum 12).

The quotes illustrate that the relationship between the museum staff and the artists is a commitment for both sides. When the museums already own one or more artworks by an artist, they continue to follow them in their studios. The museum staff call this relationship with the artist *in-depth collecting* and it composes the core of the collection practice for every museum. Nevertheless, it often happens that the oeuvre shifts in way that the work stops being interesting for the museum, which puts an end to their cooperation.

It is good to follow an artist to see the different developments, but then you think...it doesn't develop so strongly and then we stop buying (Head of collections, Museum 15).

I also look at the way artists that are already in our collection are developing...and whether we should still buy another work of this artist. Sometimes artists make this one beautiful work and then the rest is not very good (Curator, Museum 12).

Academy presentations are another place for inspiration for the museums. However, the majority of the museums does not consider it as part of their selection process. The museum staff agreed that they include artists studying at academies rather in their exhibitions. This way they help to promote the artists without having a stronger commitment of their own.

We collect artists from academies, but then it's mainly related to exhibitions. So if this artist has an exhibition here in our museum, we can decide to buy something from that artist (Head of collections, Museum 13).

The last platform to find artists is via online portals, such as Art Net. Every museum makes use of the documentation to some extent. It helps the museum staff to get more knowledge on what is happening around them, but it is not considered as a reliable source.

### *Overabundance of artists*

The previous section demonstrated the various venues and different reasons why museum teams visit them. I have noticed that the museum staff have to face two problems connected to the overabundance of the artists on the market. The first issue is the selection of the specific venues with the artists. The second difficulty is the selection from the artists at these venues. The museum staff cope with the first issue by frequently visiting the same venues. The interviewees repeatedly visit the same locations in order to see the emergence of new artists since the last time they visited. Thus, the museum staff rely on a network, which helps them to operate in the uncertain market that is oversaturated with venues. In other words, the network provides them with security among the unknown venues:

I travel a lot and go to venues where you can spot new possible artists as well as for our exhibition program but also acquisitions. So there's a lot of handwork that lies with me, using the channels of information from the layer of the staff that we have. We have kind of a network (Director, Museum 1).

In order to find the right artist at the right time, the museums staff develop close relationships with the particular venues. Powell and Smith-Doerr (1994) confirm in their research on networks and economic life, that networks indeed have an essential role in enabling access to information and resources. The ones lacking the network connections are in a serious disadvantage in finding the needed information. The networks are continuously built and rebuilt and the museum staff realise with time which gallery or fair is valuable to the museum (Giuffre, 1999). They strengthen the networks in the span of many years in which they acquire the artworks from the venue. This helps them to cope with the uncertainty from the oversupply, because this way they can rely on their network that already filters through the vast amount of artists. Thus, one could refer to the network as a protective mechanism against the oversupply:

In any case it is important to build a relationship with the gallery... They're willing to accommodate you.... You trust the gallery that they do not sell the work to other comparable museums so you both have the same...and sometimes a gallery really tries to get the artist for you (Director, Museum 10).

The second difficulty that the museum staff have to face is the vast amount of artists presented on these venues. The interviewees stressed that they do not have enough time to engage with every artist that they are confronted with. The generated uncertainty is reduced by strictly focusing on the mission of the museum while finding artists. This helps the museum staff to filter through the big amounts. For instance, if the museum selects only artworks that are in any way related to Friesland, the museum staff have already a particular lens to approach the market with:

So I go there [art fairs] and I see *a lot* [emphasis added] of artworks and from that some names pop up and we might involve them in a project that we do and we start a relationship (Head of collections, Museum 6).

In this quote, the interviewee particularly emphasised the confrontation with a high number of artists that are displayed in the venues. In the theoretical framework I discussed the abundance of artworks as the fourth source of uncertainty and it is indeed the case in this part. Thus, this stage confirms the ninth hypothesis where I argued that the museums have to face uncertainty from the oversupply of the artists on the market.

### 4.3. Learning to select art

The museum staff have mapped the artistic field where they found the artists that might have a future significance for the collection. At this point, the museum staff decide about the quality of the artworks. It is an uncertain and challenging stage in the field of cultural production. The question that arises is, how do they know which artwork is better than the other? I asked the interviewees whether they have particular quality criteria, which help them to decide on the value of the artworks. However, they were uncertain and unwilling to provide me with an answer. The museum staff stressed that the quality criteria cannot be and maybe even should not be defined. One of the interviewees noted,

You cannot give a definition for that, because if you make a definition then you will kill every living aspect of it (Head of collections, Museum 3).

During the interviews, the museum staff found it hard to explain the quality of the artworks with words. They “just look” and when they find new artists they recognise what is “good”. The connection with the artwork is described as intuitive. Thus, the museum staff claim to have developed a good eye for artworks that enables them to “just look” and know what is “good”. The quotes illustrate the emotional responses of the interviewees:

There are no rules. It's pure intuition by looking.... The only thing you have to do when I show a picture of a painting is look, look through. When you learn how to look, that's a gift (Director, Museum 7).

It's not really a criterion, it's not really a quality judgement. What's a quality in an artwork? The fact that an artwork keeps on giving, that the first time you see it there's going to be some kind of response, you're going to look at it and you're not really going to get it, not completely get it, [you will] feel irritated by it, wonder, and it's going to haunt you. And if you keep on coming back to the same work and you will feel intrigued by it, amazed by it, then you start having a good work, because a good work should never be exhausted, so I don't think you can really formally put it in a way. It's just what it does to you (Curator, Museum 4).

While lacking a solid base of quality criteria, the museum staff rely on their feelings, intuition and personal taste. Thus, museum staff “feel and experience” whether an artwork possesses a certain quality, which makes it worthy to be a part of the collection in the museum. This confirms the fourth hypothesis where I argued that intuition is a driving force in the decisions



of the museum staff. Interestingly, the museum staff consider the artists themselves to be a learning tool in looking at the artworks. They refer to the artists as particularly good lookers, who approach the artworks more closely and differently, because they can “feel” more. When I enquired what exactly makes the artists better in looking, then the same issue as with defining quality criteria occurred. The museum staff said that you “just know” how it differs, but it cannot be described with words. Hence, by visiting the artists in their studios the museum staff also learn to determine quality of the works.

Thus, the museum staff “feel” when an artwork has a good quality and that it should become a part of their collection. Bourdieu describes this as *the feel for the game* (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 66). Under this term, he refers to a strategic, but subjective skill that is developed through experience and social dispositions. It is the encounter of habitus (social inclination) and the field (practice) (1990, p. 66). Like in the feel for the game, the museum staff develop their judgment by practice. It is a process of trial and error and through time one develops certain affinities towards specific genres of art. The experience is gained through the visits to the different venues where the museum staff find the artists, which was elaborated on in the previous chapter.

Yes, I think it is by an experience. It is something that you build up, you can either develop a certain sensitivity or an eye for developments, for what is good and what is not good. If that was possible to define in words, then I think that the whole art world would not exist in a way that it exists right now (Head of collections, Museum 3).

For me I try to develop myself by also visiting as much museums and art fairs as possible (Head of collections, Museum 11).

These quotes substantiate Bourdieu’s argument on taste, which is learnt by doing. The museum staff are thus the gatekeepers as tastemakers as described in the theory. They are exposed to the finished artwork and their role lies in determining whether the artist has the unique quality according to their taste, which also confirms the eighth hypothesis (Bourdieu, 1984). Through the years of looking around and observing the changing trends in the art market, the museum staff develop their expertise. In addition to experience, the expertise is built up from their knowledge of art history and the reading of reviews and articles on art. The knowledge of the museum staff is based on similar backgrounds in art history and curating, which is also what groups them in the same category of legitimate taste (Bourdieu, 1984).

Even though the museum staff are aware of their expertise, at the same time they feel the pressure to keep on refreshing their practice. It is problematic to get attached to a certain way of looking at things, which makes it important to keep constantly developing and finding new artists. However, this development should not shift completely from one's vision of art. After all, it is a human job and their choices remain to be well informed choices, as the interviewee remarked:

Sometimes I cannot deny that when you see a work of art and you are immediately touched by it and I think I'm not the only one who will encounter this immediacy of an artwork and I think this shouldn't be neglected. But I cannot depart only from my own involvement in that artwork. I should go beyond that, I should ask myself, will the public of this museum be interested in such an artwork? Is it important for the collection to have such an artwork? (Curator, Museum 12).

The quote illustrates that the judgement on quality of art lies between expertise and personal taste. "Unavoidable" was the most common answer on the role of personal taste. Even though it is vital for the museum staff to distinguish between their personal taste and expertise, after some time "your personal taste and expertise are sort of mixed up. It's not a science, it is art, and it's difficult" (Head of collections, Museum 13). Though, personal taste was not considered as something negative. The museum staff are proud of their personal taste and their responsibility to decide on the quality. The decisions are pivotal and one should be personally satisfied with the choices:

There is a strong element of personal taste...and I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing.... You should find a balance between personal taste and institutional policy - the past of an organisation or of a collection and of course an awareness of what's going on around you (Curator, Museum 14).

To kind of close my mind and close my feelings? That doesn't work (Curator, Museum 9).

Thus, through practice the museum staff gain a feeling where they just know that an artwork is good without being fully conscious of it. At this stage, the central problem appeared to be uncertainty, because the museum staff must rely on their own intuition and expertise. Moreover, despite the fact that the decisions are individual, there is noticeable influence from the art market. As mentioned in the previous chapters, the museum staff are trapped in between the decision on established and emerging artists. That said, there is a strong

influence from their role in the field. The museum staff attempt to buy what is “good”, but also what is good in relation to the already existing collection.

#### 4.4. Collaboration versus competition between the museums

At this point, the museums take into account each other's collections. Thus, in this section I describe how the museums cooperate and what makes them compete with each other. First, I elaborate on the collaboration among the museums, which is rooted in the Dutch cultural policy and the concept of Collection Nederland that was explained in the introduction. The core argument of this policy is to foster the cooperation between museums in terms of the collection, in order to display the majority of the artworks (Bussemaker, 2013, p. 2).

The Collection Nederland is highly promoted by the Dutch cultural policy and with an aim to diversify what is collected in the Netherlands, museums follow this policy by often coordinating their selection. Through this coordination process the museums try to create a niche for themselves, which keeps a certain amount of diversity and as such prevents isomorphism from happening (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). However, this does not count with the most popular artists in the field, because all museums are interested in having an artwork by the leading artists in the art market. On the top we clearly see that museums have similar interests and also compete with each other:

Everybody is after the same high standards and so you are also competitors of each other.... Because you wouldn't first discuss with your colleagues because there might be a competition for the same artist and of course there is competition for *those* [emphasis added] artists. Everybody wants the best artists in their museum (Head of collections, Museum 2).

The competition among the museums is determined by their economic capital. When it comes to the popular artists on the market, the museums evidently need to have a specific economic strength. The quote illustrates that the driving force of the competition between the museums is to acquire the popular artist on the specific market of the museums. For instance, the photography museums have different top artists than museums centred on contemporary design. All in all, the acquisitions of top artists are aimed at large audiences. Museum staff refer to these works as *blockbusters*. Thus, the competition is based on what Bourdieu (1983) describes as heteronomous principle, where the acquisitions are driven primarily by the commercial wealth. Additionally, the blockbusters are also a symbol of status. The collections serve as the main representation of the museums. Thus, by having a few or plenty of the blockbusters, the museum staff feel that their collection gains value. Hence, the museums compete in the field in order to obtain a position of power (Bourdieu, 1996).

The Collection Nederland remains to be a leading principle when it comes to the artists who do not belong to the top in the art market. What is interesting here is that the policy creates isomorphism in the process, but not on the level of results. Collection Nederland leads to the procedures of museums becoming more similar, because they all check each other's collections. However, the outcome of this process is that the collections become more diverse. Thus, it is the Collection Nederland has an impact on the field by structuring the processes of the museums (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). This confirms the fifth: the museums have more diverse collections due to the structuration imposed on them by the Collection Nederland. Furthermore, now that the basic principles of Collection Nederland are clear, it is interesting to see what it is that makes the policy so appealing to the museums. The driving force for cooperation is the size of the country, which allows but also requires the museums to cooperate:

Netherlands is a very tiny country and all these collections refer to each other. When I buy something from an artist that is quite well known or even not known, I always ask who else in the Netherlands has a work of this artist (Director, Museum 10).

Museum staff have three main reasons that substantiate the size of the country as one of the main motives for cooperation. Firstly, it is advantageous from a financial perspective. This way, the museums can afford to buy more artworks to become a part of their collection. Thus, it is useful, but also required to have an active loan policy or co-acquisitions. On the one hand, public museums are conscious of spending the taxpayers' money. On the other hand, they are aware that the funds "warmly support" cooperation.

It's also about what other museums do and you don't want to compete with each other and then making the prices higher, because it's not necessary, because you can always loan important parts from each other if you're making an exhibition (Head of collections, Museum 11).

We do also a co-ownership, because we believe in a co-ownership as we are a small country and especially when it is a high priced works, when it is above 100 thousand, we try to see if there is another institution that is willing to participate with us (Head of collections, Museum 3).

The quotes illustrate the uncertainty in the cultural field that is created by high prices of the artworks. This eventually makes the museums cooperate with each other in order to stabilise the market, which confirms the sixth hypothesis. Secondly, the interviewees regarded the

variety of the collection as something that is necessary, because it makes them more attractive to the audiences. Thus, if museum staff see that other museums in the Netherlands already acquired an artwork by this artist, they can select different ones, which allows for a bigger diversity in future exhibitions. The third reason is the pride of the museums to contribute to the Collection Nederland. They feel the responsibility of preserving cultural heritage: “Yes, of course. Collection Nederland is important for us. We are contributing in a very special way” (Director, Museum 7).

Through the interviews I have noticed that the museum staff are generally prone to the Collection Nederland and they underline the advantageous points of it. However, there are few museums that do not take Collection Nederland into account as they feel that it does not match their mission as a museum. They go strictly against the idea of isomorphism, both in the process and the results, because they believe that the final experience occurs in the museum itself. Thus, they do not factor in other collections:

Back then he [the director] very consciously chose not to think in these kind of terms [Collection Nederland], because what you're going to experience most of the times as a viewer or anyone, it's going to be within one space and what can you get of that. So, there is this conscious decision that it needs to work within the context (Curator, Museum 4).

Even though there are few museums that do not agree with Collection Nederland, it is clear that at this stage, all of the museums want to secure diversity and have their own unique identity. Thus, the museums are part of one big network in which they exchange information to achieve the above-mentioned goals. In addition to this big network, the museums have their own smaller network within the Netherlands with whom they discuss possible thematic preferences. Within the small network that usually comprises of three or four “sister museums”, the museums check whether the artists that they have found intriguing are perhaps more suitable for the collection of the other museums. This resembles the neo-institutionalists’ understanding of organisations as grounded in political and social realms, in which they are involved in a network that was created by a mutual endeavour of the institutions (Rowan and Meyer, 1977, p. 360). The following quote demonstrates the collaboration within the small network in practice:

The new director liked this work very much, but that was collected for a long time by [the sister museum], but they stopped following him based also on the fact that he

became very expensive. So we bought a work that was meaningful for our collection, but also meaningful for the line that was already collected by [the sister museum]. So that's why we try to be aware of our position constantly (Head of collections, Museum 3).

The museums sometimes work so closely in their small network that they also organise meetings where they discuss the directions in terms of acquisitions in the near future. In these meetings, the museums, for instance, decide on who will be collecting from which gallery or what artists will receive the main focus. Here, the unique identity of the museums comes into play. The museums admit that there need to be boundaries in order to stay focused on pursuing their own mission and objectives. However, as much as these informal networks are about cooperation, the museums remain to be in the state of competitive awareness (White, 2005, Bourdieu, 1983). One of the interviewees noted,

You would try to make a deal with an artist...and then you would go to your colleagues and ask (Head of collections, Museum 2).

In this section, I have discussed the cooperation and competition among the museums. The cooperation fostered by the Collection Nederland and the existence of smaller sub-networks among the museums, stress that the museums are strongly influenced by their environments. This is not purely on the basis of competition, but also in the way they are structured and achieve their goals (Scott, 2003). Hypothesis 3a is, therefore, confirmed: museums have an open system, which leads to coordination among the museums in the field. At the same time, this disproves hypothesis 3b that argued for the museums having a fixed system (Bourdieu, 1993). It is disproved because the museums are clearly not sealed off from the environment around them, but they are open to and even dependent on the environment (Scott, 1993).

## 4.5. Funding

Funding is an element that every museum needs to consider when acquiring artworks. This part in the selection process highlights the contradictory notion of contemporary art where the value of the artworks is regarded as priceless, while there is the need to account for the monetary value of them. The significance that is given to funding varies per museum. I have come across one main difference in the approach towards funding, which is the dependence on private and public funding. The significance stems from the influence by the different agents in the cultural field. I will start with elaborating on the funding of the private museums, followed by the public ones.

The uniting element of the four private museums is their origin in a private foundation set up by either one person or a group of people. All the private museums have as their core a private collection, mostly a testament, upon which they keep building on. This foundation should be used to continue stimulating contemporary art. Moreover, the majority of the private museums work with a fixed budget per year without any governmental support. In contrast to the public museums, they do not have to explain their financial choices to a variety of public funds in order to acquire the artworks. Thus, private museums can enjoy the freedom from the pressure of spending the taxpayers' money.

We don't have to tell Mondriaan funds what we do and why we do it. You can act more quickly in that sense, but also more strictly. You know, [public museums], if they feel like they need a work they will ask a funding for it. So, doesn't matter you know how much it is if it is over budget, as long as you get this extra funding. We don't have that but within the strict budget we do have the flexibility of making decisions without having to explain them to the world, not financially at least (Curator, Museum 4).

There is another side to the freedom from the public funds. One interviewee explained that others look at private museums as institutions without many rules and the freedom to do anything. However, private museums have to deal with a different set of issues. As explained above, private museums have their fixed budget, which also means that they cannot ask for additional funding. If there are, for instance, two artworks that exceed the budget, it means that the museum has to pick one of those and the second one can be only acquired in the next budget term. The strict choices are also in terms of not producing publications or working in a very small team in order to be able to devote most of the budget to the art.



Through the interviews I have noticed that the private museums might have a small budget that makes their choices stricter, but the artistic freedom is visible. It became clear that the private funds do not require the level of instructions for acquisitions like it is for public museums. The strictness in acquiring is apparent in the size of the museums' collections, because none of the museums owns more than 800 works. Hence, the gatekeeping process tends to be more slow than in the case of public museums:

If you look at our collection, it's very slowly growing. So it's a really slow curating or slow acquisitions in that sense (Curator, Museum 4).

Yes, the budget is a big problem. It's a small museum with almost no possibilities to acquire. I have more wishes than things are combined. But I am depending on funds here who have a board and often support me. That's how we can acquire art (Director, Museum 7).

Now that the approach of the private museums is clear, it is important to take into account the way that public museums, which is the majority, handle their budget in terms of acquisitions. As financial basis, they have a budget of their own, which is in all of the cases too small to be able to finance the acquisitions as such. The museums additionally rely on a variety of funds by public organs such as municipalities, regions and the national government. A large amount of the external funding for public museums comes from a type of governmental support called the Mondriaan Fund. The basic principles of the foundation were explained in the previous chapters.

The Mondriaan Foundation and most of the other foundations, such as BankGiro Loterij, have certain rules for the acquisitions that influence the selection of art in public museums. Through the interviews I have come across six main regulations that the foundations require from the museums. The first two rules are concerned with the explanation for acquiring the work and its relation to the collection. These principles are still in the same manner as the ones of private museums. However, the following four rules apply only for the public museums and thus, shape distinctively their acquisitions. The third rule is that a certain part from the funding needs to be spent on artists that were born later than 1945. Fourthly, a part of the acquisitions must comprise of Dutch artists. The fifth requirement is the relation of the artwork to the Collection Nederland, which was discussed in the previous chapter. This rule stresses the growing influence of the state in the structuration of the museums. The state is exerting pressure on the institutions by regulating their funds (Frumkin and Galaskiewicz,

2004). In other words, by demanding cooperation among the museums even through the funding, the state is imposing the direction of the organisational change in the cultural field (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983).

But I think it's a continuous debate, the process of applying for funds, for instance, the Mondrian funds.... That's a reoccurring thing and you have to, of course, also give them an end report where you explain why you bought these works and why they're important and then you have to always relate them to the Collection Netherland (Head of collections, Museum 11).

The last requirement is to have at least fifty percent of the needed amount financed by other means, after which the Mondriaan fund will finance the additional half. In general, the museums accept this rule as a sign of commitment from their side. Nevertheless, this requirement can force the museums to stop receiving the support from the Mondriaan Fund, which can cause noticeable difficulties not only in terms of new acquisitions. One limitation bound to the financial aid from Mondriaan Fund is the need to spend the given amount in two years after receiving it. However, the interviewees generally consider to have financial freedom provided by the external funds. For instance, they warmly welcome the alternative to ask for additional money from the funds while acquiring more expensive artworks. All in all, it is clear that the Mondriaan Fund demands the rules to be able to show the public that their money is well spent. Thus, as a governmental institution they have as their goal to steer the development of the Dutch culture and the arts.

The borders are flexible, there are possibilities if you want to acquire a very expensive work, then we can ask money from Mondriaan Fund. For special acquisitions, we have our promoters club, so there are possibilities (Head of collections, Museum 6).

This quote demonstrates that the funding possibilities do not have such strong limits, not financially at least. In contrast, I have noticed that the artistic value seems to be partially left behind. The museum staff agreed that in order to receive the money from the Mondriaan Fund, one needs to have good fundraising skills. For instance, one of the interviewees admitted that the acquisitions that get funded do not necessarily possess good artistic quality. It is not “difficult” to have the application accepted as long as it is well written. The interviewee noted: “If you have a good story, then the funds will love to pay money for it” (Head of collections, Museum 13).

Before the museums step into the decision-making process, they have to take into account the available space in their storage. Every museum that has a collection needs to store the artworks in a depot, which can either belong to the museum itself or an external institution. Even though the buying price of the artworks is crucial, the future cost that the work will require could be even higher. As mentioned in the theory part, the disposal of artworks is disliked by the museums, which stresses the responsibility of strictly acquiring new artworks. In contrast to private collectors, museums are not buying artworks in order to sell them in the future. Thus, once it becomes a part of the collection it needs to be maintained. For instance, the museums attempt to avoid artworks that are too big to be stored or artworks that demand extensive maintenance, because it is too expensive to preserve them:

You also have a responsibility of taking a good care of every object that enters your collection, which you have to register, photograph and put into your storage facility with a good packaging. That also costs a lot of money and time of your staff and also space in your storage facility, so that's always something that you have to consider (Head of collections, Museum 11).

It's a very large responsibility of course, because you want to obtain and contain the work for the future in the best way possible, in the best conditions possible, so that's a rule that takes a lot of time, also it is a very expensive rule (Director, Museum 10).

So far I have discussed the way the museums find the artists, how they take into account other museums, funding and storage. All of these factors could be seen as a strong basis for the development of intellectual frameworks as an approach to collecting, which I have discussed in the theoretical framework. Through the chapters the mission of the museum seemed to be the driving force, which is also important in the creation of the intellectual frameworks. Thus, the museums would in general comply with having the intellectual framework as their form of assessment for future acquisitions, which is also the first hypothesis. However, in order to confirm this hypothesis, it would be necessary to specifically talk to the interviewees about the creation of the intellectual framework and whether they make use of it or not. Thus, even though the museums seem to be close to the application of the intellectual framework, the first hypothesis cannot be confirmed.

#### 4.6. The legitimization of choices

All the steps that were discussed so far are factors and tools that the museum staff need to take into account when acquiring new artists. At this point, the museum staff need to legitimise their initial “just looking” at the artworks. The museum staff legitimise their selections through meetings where they convincingly explain the value that they saw in the artwork. This step is characteristic for highly institutionalised contexts where the quality criteria are uncertain (Bielby and Bileby, 1994). Thus, I will test here hypothesis two, which argues that the lack of quality criteria in the arts leads to the museum staff using rhetorical strategies to legitimise their decisions. Firstly, I elaborate on the basis of the meetings in the museums. Secondly, I explain two approaches to the organisation of the meetings.

##### *Meetings*

At this stage of the acquisition process, all the gathered opinions are discussed with the rest of the team in the museum. This can be a matter of just two people, up to a bigger group. I have come across three frequencies in which the museums hold the meetings. Firstly, some museums do not hold meetings at all, because the team is too small or there is not enough time. In this case, it is typical to communicate solely via email or phone. Secondly, the museum staff have meetings once every two years when there is the need to apply for the funds and improve the acquisition policy. Lastly, the majority of the museums has meetings every week or every month, with the people involved in the selection process, which is mostly the curators, the head of collections and the director. The discussions are held on an informal basis, due to the lack of time of the museum staff. Regardless the frequency of the meetings, all of the museums inform each other about the suggestions on acquisitions via email, as the following quotes illustrate:

Meetings are rather informal, besides the more general discussions about what should the policy be, which is maybe something you put down in writing in every four years or something, there is a lot of quick back and forth about acquisitions... (Curator, Museum 14).

During these meetings we discuss several things, interesting people we met or places we went to or interesting developments. We discuss the loans that have been asked for, if the work can travel, if we find the exhibitions of good quality or also the good condition of the works if they can travel. We also discuss acquisitions there, but that's mainly through an email. ...then we all send it [possible acquisition] around and we

ask if we want to consider this, is this interesting, does it fit within our collection (Head of collections, Museum 11).

Through the interviews I have noticed that small museums tend to compare themselves to the museums with a bigger team. In principal, they believe that the bigger museums have formal and regular discussions, which stipulates them as more organised and important. This urge to compare to others is called the social comparison process. It is characterised by the desire to know the information about others and further comparing to others (Taylor and Lobel, 1989). Nevertheless, it became clear that this is just an illusion. Museums with a bigger team indeed have a higher intensity of meetings, but the team involved is often incomplete due to the tighter schedules of the museum staff. In addition, the lack of time causes that the acquisitions are not discussed as elaborately as preferred by the museum staff. The quotes below illustrate the expectations of the museums with smaller teams and the reality of the museums with bigger teams:

I expect other museums, the bigger museums, to have all kind of processes and I don't want to give the impression that we're a bunch of amateurs here, but it is in the state of honesty an informal process, if you can even call it that (Curator, Museum 14).

The meetings are quite fast, yes. Sometimes it is just me and the director (Head of collections, Museum 13).

### *Organic process versus proposal*

The meetings where the museum staff discuss acquisitions are organised in two ways. These are not dependent on whether they are face to face discussions or via e-mails. The first approach is based on an organic structure. In contrast, the second one concentrates on proposals for acquisitions. The organic process is employed by eight out of the fifteen museums examined in this thesis and it is characterised by the museums focusing on their mission without strictly following the acquisition policy. The main direction of the museums is set by the director and the rest of the team tries to translate the mission of the museum into the acquisitions. The structure of the meetings is not predetermined, because it is a fluid process in which the museum staff bring up artists that match the mission of the museum and the current projects that they are working on. One of the interviewees elaborated on the boundaries of the buy:

So, yes, I think there are three things. One: do I like it, two: does it fit the collection, do we have more works by this artist for example or does it just fit and three: what do

we expect from the future, is this for us an investment that we think it will work out well for the collection in the future (Director, Museum 10).

The quote illustrates that the organic process has broad guidelines. In contrast, the other half of the museums structures their meetings with a written proposal. The basic requirements of the proposal are gathered in the previous stages and those are: what the artwork is about, what makes it relevant for the collection and how much does it cost. What differs here from the organic process is that the boundaries of a buy have a clearer structure that is dependent on the policy of the museum. Thus, during the meetings the proposal is presented and discussed with the rest of the colleagues in the museums. Nevertheless, the interviewees emphasised that the proposal are just boundaries, not a quality criterion or a definition on how to acquire art:

But there is exactly this tension between giving some sort of definition and on the other hand you confront the view with something new which is puzzling which is kind of disturbing your thoughts and in this middle you need to operate (Head of collections, Museum 3).

Now that the basic elements of the two approaches are clear, I will elaborate on the way the museum staff convince the rest of the colleagues on the quality of the artworks. This stage is the same for all of the museums, no matter if they have an organic process or proposals. During the meetings, the museum staff share with each other what kind of artists and artworks they have found to be valuable enough to become a part of the collection. At this point, the initial “just look” on an artwork, needs to have some form in order to legitimise it:

Yes, I try to convince my colleagues and say why we should do it... I explain why it would be very good to have this or that work in our collection and then we discuss about it (Curator, Museum 12).

Museums staff operate to some extent with rhetorical strategies that help them to legitimise and thus, precisely express why this artist is important for the museum. These strategies are also used in publishing (Franssen and Kuipers, 2013) or network television programming (Bielby and Bileby, 1994). My findings are similar to the ones of the mentioned researches in the sense that they suggest that rhetorical strategies are used a consequence of the lack of quality criteria in the arts. However, my findings differ in the way the strategies are used by the museums.

The findings of Bielby and Bielby stress that genre, imitation and reputation are key rhetorical strategies in the cultural industries (1994, p. 1293). In contrast to their findings, I find that genre is not a decisive strategy for the museum staff, because it is something that is already established in the mission of the museum. In addition, contemporary art is breaking the boundaries of “classifying artists” and thus genre is not that important anymore (Dumbazde and Hudson, 2013). One of the interviewees noted,

Up until the beginning of the 80s there were these...labels. Yes, the labelling, like conceptual art and minimal art. But that doesn't work anymore, which I think is very good, because I hated those stamps.... Is it something quite new, it will open new perspectives, new ways of seeing, that's interesting (Curator, Museum 9).

Reputation and imitation are arguments that play a role during the meetings. These two strategies depend on whether the museums are purchasing emerging or established artists. When it comes to the established artists, it is a must that he or she has built up a reputation. Thus, the museum staff use the reputation of the artist as a strategy in which they argue for the promotion that it brings to the museum. This way, the museums cope with the uncertainty by using it to their own advantage:

I notice this artist is very famous and everybody wants this artwork and then I say in the meetings that we should buy it.... An artwork that is already famous and important makes you even more important as an institution (Curator, Museum 12).

Moreover, the museum staff use imitation during the meetings as a way to handle the uncertainty of emerging artists. They legitimise an emerging artist through its link to the established one. For instance, they show the connection between the two artists in a way that they can exhibit them simultaneously in the future. This way the artist gains relevance for the museum. Additionally, I find a fourth strategy, which is crucial for the museum staff. This strategy is the way in which the artworks need to match the collection. It is one of the leading principles that the museum staff need to always have on their mind. Thus, during the meetings it is considered as a necessary argument:

So I ask myself the question if they [artworks] fit in the line of collecting that the founder of this museum had and, and it's absolutely eminent that I can answer this question with a yes. If I went against the general collection of the museum it would be lost money in my opinion.... As a staff, we discuss that question, what is the identity

of this collection and how do you improve on that identity without losing it and that's complicated, but interesting (Director, Museum 1).

The museum staff use four rhetorical strategies, which are important in their field where there is visible uncertainty on the quality criteria. The museum staff operate with the rhetorical strategies to demonstrate that their choices are proper and rational, which confirms the second hypothesis. The subsequent step after the legitimation is in many cases an exhibition of the artist in the museum. In some cases, the acquisitions are even matching the exhibition history. It is also a way to get to know the artists more in depth and thereby start a dialogue. The collaboration with the artist is often so intense that the museum even shapes the artwork, which is the case, for instance, with artworks on commission where the museums become the co-creators of the artworks (Irvin, 2006, p. 145). However, this approach is also time-consuming and expensive, which is why it is not the case for every artwork acquired by the museum.



#### 4.7. The final decision: director versus the rest of the staff

At this point the museum staff finally decide on whether the artworks will be acquired or not. In most of the cases, the final decision follows after every single artwork that was legitimised. However, in some cases the museums legitimise a range of works and subsequently, they decide which ones are the truly significant one. This point in decision-making can be considered as an uncertain stage in the field of cultural production. Here, museums are facing the contradictory notion of contemporary artworks where they select an artist which becomes significant for the future, while they simultaneously mark him or her as an important part in history. This is similar to the starting point where museum staff find the artists that could eventually become a part of the collection. However, I think that the uncertainty re-emerges, because it is the final step in which the artwork is accepted or dismissed. So, this is the actual point where it is marked to become a part of the collection.

This stage is purely about the final decision after all the previous factors, influences and steps. In all of the museums scrutinised in this thesis, it is the director who has the final word. What differs per museum is the extent to which the director takes into consideration the suggestions of the curators or the heads of collections in the legitimisation process. In the majority of the museums, the curators or the heads of collections strive to legitimise their choices for possible acquisitions. These attempts have an equal chance to get accepted or refused by the director. In the remaining four museums, the museum staff have a bigger say in what will become a part of the collection. This does not change the fact that the director has the final decision, but their suggestions strongly shape the development in terms of acquisitions. The quotes below demonstrate the contrasting approaches:

No, the team does not have a say in the acquisitions unless we do a show together (Director, Museum 10).

I think that [the director] has a big stamp on everything which is decided here also on the things which are bought but also on the exhibitions that we do. But everything is under discussion.... It's a combination but he's the end responsible for it. Yes, so he's always the one saying yes or not if we're going to buy something (Head of collections, Museum 13).

It's the director who decides, but we, the curators are quite important in the co-deciding (Head of collections, Museum 6).

The decision is always done by the director and the curator together (Head of collections, Museum 15).

Thus, the museum directors in the Netherlands have the executive power in deciding on the acquisitions. Even though all the steps on legitimation decreased the uncertainty, the directors still need to face the final decision that coins the artworks as a part of the collection. The directors described that this point is always difficult, but in the end they have to rely on their expertise and “just looking”. Thus, the curators or heads of collection are in the end mainly responsible for the planning of the exhibitions, or taking care of the collection in the case of the head of collections. However, director’s power to decide is not as negatively viewed as one might expect. The majority of the museums agree that the final decision on acquisitions should not be a democratic process. The interviewees stress the need for one main figure deciding and shaping the directions of the museum. This is under the condition that the director changes every five or ten years in order to keep the acquisition repertoire fresh.

So people ask you, do you have a job and you can also say no because it's kind of your life, so it's not a job, it's very hard to know where it stops and where it ends and so, yes, that's also a very nice thing about that (Director, Museum 5).

This section highlighted that even though the selection process is a matter of the whole team, the final decision belongs to the director. The quote illustrates that the directors are aware of their power and the responsibility that comes with the decision, yet they consider their job as a way of living. There is a slight uncertainty in the point, because the directors have to decide on the acquisition to actually become a part of the collection. However, they rely on their expertise and their eye for the artworks.

## 5. Conclusion

In this thesis I have investigated the answer to the question how contemporary visual art museums in the Netherlands decide on what artworks to buy. By observing the practice of museum staff functioning as the gatekeepers of the artists, I have tackled the challenges during the acquisition process. Museum staff face three main difficulties: oversupply of new artists, uncertainty about the quality of new artists and competition for artworks of top artists. They manage these challenges through trust in their networks and sub-networks in addition to their own expertise. The emergence of the networks among the museums is partially the result of the governmental policy called Collection Nederland. The increasing cooperation among the museums leads to decreasing isomorphism on the level of acquisitions. The collections of the museums become more diverse. Interestingly, the continuous dependence on information from other museums, results in growing isomorphism in the acquisition process. The processes become more standardised, because all of the museums inspect each other's collections before acquiring new artworks.

I observed the whole decision-making process in the acquisition of new artworks as a social and institutional process, which is embedded in the national field. The perspective of neo-institutionalism allowed this research clarify the organisational strategies and practices, such as the gatekeeping process and its nature in networks. This approach revealed how museum staff face uncertainty throughout the selection process and the ways they cope with it by using particular strategies. The field theory of Bourdieu shed light on the competition in the field. Bourdieu's theory pointed me towards the discussion on the status rivalry of the field and the personal taste mixed with expertise as the driving force in decisions. The struggle between art and commerce helped me to grasp the crucial decisions between established and emerging artists offered on the art market. Accordingly, I recognised the use of both theories as complimentary to each other. Neo-institutionalism allowed to understand the organisations as an open system that is influenced by its environment. Bourdieu's field theory was fruitful in the exploration of the field in terms of power and status struggles.

The thesis also adds to the existing research. First, I have found that in contrast to Bourdieu's theory, the autonomous principle is not solely driven by the intrinsic value of art. The limited budget and the high prices for artworks of established artists force the museums to also collect emerging artists. However, the collecting of emerging contemporary artists confirmed to be more uncertain than the collecting of Old Masters. Time was indeed regarded

as the only way to determine the future success of an artist. Thus, museums are facing a contradiction where emerging artists constitute an uncertain field of collecting, while at the same time the museum staff cannot collect only established artists due to their high price.

Moreover, the research confirmed that the gatekeeping process is social in its nature. Throughout the process, museum staff rely on different agents in the cultural field, such as other museums or venues offering art. The increased cooperation among the museums stems from the growing uncertainty that is typical for the cultural field. Museums cope with the uncertainty by “distributing” their selection via the cooperation fostered by Collection Nederland. When the museum staff recognise an artwork to be of “good quality”, it is solely a matter of an individual’s choice. The museum staff rely purely on their intuition guided by expertise, which also confirms their role of gatekeepers as taste makers. The subsequent legitimisation of the choice is again inherently social. This thesis underlines other studies where agents operate with a lack of quality criteria and are therefore forced to apply rhetorical strategies to legitimise their decisions (Bielby and Bielby, 1994, Franssen and Kuipers, 2013).

Lastly, I analysed the acquisition of new artists as a gatekeeping process that happens in cooperation with various actors. The process is influenced by seven key stages, which do not occur hierarchically. This perspective emphasised the challenges and subsequent solutions of museum staff during the selection process. I noticed that the practices of museum staff change according to the position of artists in the market, the location and the funding. The uncertainties stemming from the oversupply of artists and the lack of quality criteria were present in the stages to varying degrees. Moreover, the same museum staff select both emerging and established artists. This is followed with the legitimisation, where the museum staff rely on similar strategies for both types of artists. Thus, the field of visual contemporary art museums is not coordinated by just one logic. This research indicates that the clearly defined division of art and commerce is not the underlying principle around which cultural fields are organised.

Further research could investigate the acquisition policy documents in depth to see the similarities and differences in the written approaches. This study did not allow for a deeper analysis of the policy plans, because they are laid down in Dutch. Additionally, the policies could be analysed and compared to the ways the museums operate in their daily practice as described in this thesis. This could reveal whether the museums are strictly influenced by the

policy. In addition, it could be interesting to compare the policies among the museums in the Netherlands to see the similarities and differences. Moreover, future research could be oriented towards mapping all of the contemporary art museums in the Netherlands to see whether there can be found another pattern that was not elaborated on in this research. Furthermore, it could be also intriguing to conduct a research on the networks among museums, both the main networks and the sub-networks. The in-depth analysis of networks might uncover their structure and subsequently their power.

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# Appendix A

## Interview guide

### Interview opening:

1. Introduction of myself and the research project I am working on.
2. Could you please introduce yourself and your background?
  - a. What is your role in the institution?

### Questions:

New artists = contemporary artists new to their collection.

Selection = selecting a number of artists

Decision = decide which ones to take

### A) Focus of the collection

1. What steps do you need to take before you make a decision on the acquisition?
2. What is the focus of your collection?
3. From what time period do you select contemporary artists?
4. Extra question: Do you also collect emerging artists?

### B) Internal reasons for buying an artwork: process of selection of an artist

1. Do you have a specific process that you follow in the selection of new artists? What steps do you take?
  - a. Do you have regular meetings to discuss the selection of new artists?
  - b. Who is involved in those meetings?
2. Does your personal taste play a role in selecting of new artists?
3. Where did you learn how to select new artists? Do you make mistakes?
4. What values do you take into account when selecting new artists?
  - a. Do you have a list of 'significance criteria' (values and meanings of the artwork, priorities) in assessing new acquisitions?
5. To what extent does a budget play a role in the selection?
  - a. To what extent does money determine who takes part in the selection process? [E.g. whether a more expensive artwork is discussed by different/more people than usual]
  - b. Do you take into account short-term vs long-term costs of acquisitions?
6. Do all the artists go through the same selection process?

C) Internal reasons: selection in relation to its collection

1. Do you have specific periods of a year in which you select new artists?
2. Does the selection of artists center on particular themes in your exhibitions?
3. Do you think there is anything distinctive about your institution and its methods of selecting new artists?
4. How did your process of selecting new artists develop through the years? What were the main influences?

D) Internal reasons: selection of artworks

1. Why do you choose a particular artwork when an artist produces so many?
2. Could you give me an example of the last artwork that you have purchased?
  - a. Yes – great! Could you tell me something more about it?
  - b. Not – I have noticed on your page that you bought X and Y. Could you tell me something more about it?
3. Can you recall a particular acquisition that you consider as a very significant one?
  - a. Or an acquisition that you particularly disagreed with?
4. What do you personally think about the approach of your institution to the selection of new artists?

E) Internal reasons: Decision on the selection

1. How do you make a decision on the selection of new artists?
  - a. Who is involved in the process?
  - b. Do you make all the decisions together?
2. How do you deal with the uncertainty/instability of contemporary art in the decision-making process?
3. [Would it be possible for me to join one of the meetings?]

F) External reasons for buying an artwork

1. Where do you look for new artists?
  - a. Do you go to fairs? Which ones and why?
  - b. What documentation do you use? Do you use artnet?
2. To what extent does your personal acquaintance with the artist play a role?
  - a. [Would it be possible to join you while visiting studios?]
3. Do you factor in other contemporary collections to your selection process?
4. To what extent do you take into consideration recent trends in contemporary art?

### G) Ending

1. Thank you very much for your time to conduct this interview. Has everything been covered or is there an issue / topic that is important but that we haven't addressed during our conversation?
2. Can I follow-up with additional questions, should this be necessary? Do you know about other contemporary art museums with a collection?