

**Inequity in the art market:**  
**The rationales for commercial art galleries to specialise**

*Towards inclusive curation in commercial art galleries*

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**ABSTRACT**

Female and foreign artists are underrepresented in various facets of the art world, even though the art market projects a liberal and progressive image. The gallerist is the gatekeeper for artistic talent to flourish and pursue a professional career. However, cultural diversity is often addressed in non-commercial intermediaries, whilst research on equity in the art market has been geared towards art fairs and the auction market. This qualitative study examines the role of commercial art gallerists in fostering cultural diversity in contemporary art. The data set comprises ten semi-structured interviews among art galleries and curated online art platforms in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Three themes are developed: (1) equity in the art market, (2) responsibility and appropriate measures, and (3) bias decision-making to overcome risk and uncertainty. The findings suggest that the artistic program and curation process of gallerists does not lead to cultural diversity. The selection of gallery artists is made based on the gallerists' taste and preferences to overcome the high uncertainties related to the quality of artworks and the investment into human capital with associated risks. This leads to specialisation and rational bias-decision making even though novelty is of great importance to gain a competitive advantage. The reflection of personal taste within the gallery program makes the curator vulnerable to critiques and observations that do not correspond with their self-perception. The gallerist becomes less reflective on their program and is unquestioning its potential contribution to inequality within the art market. There are no bad intentions; thus, practical solutions are provided to foster inclusive curation in commercial art galleries based on four types of attitudes towards cultural diversity.

**KEYWORDS:** cultural diversity, entrepreneurial bias, racism, sexism, contemporary art.

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## 1. Introduction

Inclusivity and equity of all races, ethnicities, genders, and bodies are pressing issues in society. As a result of stereotypes and prejudice, people with specific demographic characteristics are inherently disadvantageous. This phenomenon is also present in the art market. The lack of diversity is also present in the broader art market. Artists that are men, alive and around fifty years old, continue to dominate the Art Basel art fair over consecutive years (Curioni et al., 2015). Bocart et al. (2021) found that “females comprise less than 4% of art auction sales” (p.18). Besides, the nationality and territory of an artist have a significant effect on the potential for fame and the artistic consecration process (Quemin & van Hest, 2015). Art critics fear cultural homogenisation and Western dominance of the global art world due to the low levels of cultural diversity (Morgner, 2015). However, there seems to be an increased awareness of diversity in the art market stimulated by specific events and call-out culture<sup>1</sup>. The Black Lives Matter movement, for example, is ranked first on the ArtReview Power 100 of 2020.

These findings suggest that discriminatory practices are involved in the development of the artistic career and that the contemporary art market lacks cultural diversity. Gallery representation is essential for artists to develop their careers and become included in the art scene (Velthuis, 2005). As an intermediary in a two-sided market, the commercial art gallery is the tastemaker when selecting specific artists and advising the collector. With an oversupply of artists and only limited capacities in terms of time and space within galleries, the gallery owner is in the position to cherry-pick. Globally, 34% of the represented artists in the primary market have a foreign nationality (McAndrew, 2020, p.88), and one out of four artists represented by European art galleries are female (p.106). These striking figures are hard to reconcile with the necessity of novelty, the progressive attitude, and the left-oriented political view in the art sector. Especially since the influx of artist graduates is much more diverse (Cameron et al., 2019), it is essential to review cultural diversity and inclusivity in commercial galleries operating in the primary art market that promote artists at the start of their professional artistic career.

Given the prominent role of commercial art galleries in developing artist careers and the lack of insights on their decision-making practices, this study examines the current and

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<sup>1</sup> Call-out culture, or cancel culture, refers to “a way of behaving in a society or group in which people are often criticized in public, for example on social media, for their words or actions, or asked to explain them” (‘Call-out Culture’, n.d.).

potential role to increase cultural diversity within the art markets in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. A deeper understanding of these processes has emerged by conducting semi-structured interviews among ten gallerists that operate in the online low-art market segment. This thesis answers the following research question: What role do commercial art galleries play in fostering cultural diversity in contemporary art? Three sub-questions support the research question. First, how inclusive are the curation processes and artistic programs of commercial art galleries? Secondly, how do commercial art galleries view their role in promoting cultural diversity? Lastly, does the online gallery program present more diversified artist profiles? Given the observations on diversity in the art market, the findings expect to clarify why galleries and dealers in the primary art market do not diversify under rational behaviour. Three main themes emerged through a thematic analysis based on the 301 codes and 36 code groups identified in the transcribed interviews. The themes are **equity in the art market, responsibility and appropriate measures**, and **bias decision-making to overcome uncertainty and risk**. The discussion describes how these findings impact cultural diversity on the individual firm-level and the global and national art market. Furthermore, four attitudes towards cultural diversity can be distinguished. The practical solutions provided might stimulate these types towards a more inclusive curation process.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

This chapter explores existing theories and concepts related to cultural diversity in the art market to embed the research within its context. First, cultural diversity is examined from sociology, economics, and ecology to get a holistic view of the broad concept. This paragraph explores related terminologies such as equity and inclusivity, describes how diversity can be measured, how it functions within a decentralised system, and how digitalisation might influence cultural diversity. The second section will explore the related topics to the artists' career path by describing the art market ecosystem, the influence of demographic characteristics on success, the current situation regarding diversity in the art market and entrepreneurial bias, as well as how cultural policies are used to foster diversity in non-commercial settings. The last paragraph highlights the theoretical remarks and shows how these theories inform the research design.

### **2.1 Cultural diversity**

Cambridge dictionary defines diversity as “the condition or fact of being different or varied” (‘Diversity’, n.d.). This seemingly simple concept represents various dilemmas in all disciplines (e.g., economics, sociology, and ecology). Diversity in sociology concerns the equity and inclusivity of people with disadvantageous positions in society. From an economic perspective, diversity relates to the optimal allocation of resources to create valuable product variety that matches the different consumer preferences and needs for various products by individual consumers. Diversity in ecology, the interactions among organisms (including humans) and their physical environment, studies how the organisms affect the ecosystem. These three perspectives inform this research on cultural diversity and will be developed consecutively.

First, the sociological perspective highlights related terms such as equity, inclusivity, racism, and sexism. Secondly, the economic approach and the indicators of cultural diversity are discussed. Next, the influence of a decentralised system of actors on diversity is demonstrated through an example in bio-culture (ecology). The potential influence of digitalisation on diversity will be addressed in the final paragraph.

#### **2.1.1 Sociologic approach: prejudice, equity, and inclusivity**

Social backgrounds are shaped within a particular culture through language, norms, values, symbols, and artifacts and influence attitudes, behaviour, and life chances. In a society there



is one dominant culture, and parallel to this culture there are subcultures and countercultures. Subcultures exist within the dominant culture yet varies from it distinctively on certain, but not all, aspects. Countercultures are actively distancing itself from the dominant culture because values and norms of behaviour differ substantially from the mainstream. Modern societies are often a mixture of various cultures, subcultures, and countercultures.

Cultures often make sense only in the context of a given society and are therefore difficult to grasp by outsiders. While cultural and biological differences do exist among groups, the perceptions of an individual on other groups and cultures are often unfounded. Stereotypes are simplified generalizations about people because of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or social class (among other things). Mistaken generalizations lead to prejudice, which is a set of negative attitudes, beliefs, and judgments about whole categories of people, and about individual members of those categories, because of their physical characteristics (e.g., skin colour or clothing).

Interaction between individuals from different backgrounds can be challenging due to prejudice (i.e., negative connotations). Incomprehension of external cultures can lead to ethnocentrism, which is the belief that one particular culture is better than other cultures. Cultural relativism, the antithesis to ethnocentrism, relates to the belief that ones' behaviour or believes should be judged against the criteria of its own culture, and while cultures differ there is not one culture better or worse. Cultural relativism is stimulated by interaction between individuals from varying cultures, which helps to disconfirm stereotypes that led to prejudices (Pettigrew & Trop, 2006).

Establishment of the dominant culture in society makes it challenging for minorities to take part, which is prevalent in the labour market. In sociology, this is also referred to as the systems of privilege and oppression which operates in the wider culture: racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, classism, ableism, heterosexism. These -isms all relate to prejudice and the believe that certain minorities are in a way less than what is familiar. Discrimination relates to the conscious and unconscious behaviour based upon these believes. Merton (1949) clarifies that prejudice and discrimination do not necessarily coincide. Driven by external incentives, those that are unprejudiced might discriminate and those that are prejudiced might not discriminate. For example, a racist gallery owner might sell artworks to people of colour for its commercial benefit, or a feminist gallery owner could decide to predominantly represent male artists if their art is more sellable.

Cultural diversity relates to the variety of cultures represented. Yet, merely taking part does not necessarily mean that it is an inclusive environment. Inclusion means that in a

diverse group, everyone can show up as their true selves and bring their unique talents to the table. Instead of denying differences, inclusion is about accepting, respecting and embracing differences. Equity relates to equal opportunities by recognizing the differences in power and redistributing this power. Equality is only achieved when equity is ensured, because there is undeniable inequality among different groups of people. Quotas is one of the tools used to artificially reinforce equity in a prejudiced society. From a sociological perspective, cultural diversity decreases prejudices through the interaction of cultures. Stimulating cultural diversity by increasing variety is not sufficient, taking equity of opportunities and the inclusion are as important for minorities to take part. Cultural diversity is a merit in and off itself. Everyone deserves equal opportunities, and the diversity in firms or collectives should ideally reflect the diversity in society.

### **2.1.2 Economic approach: trade-offs, balance, and disparity**

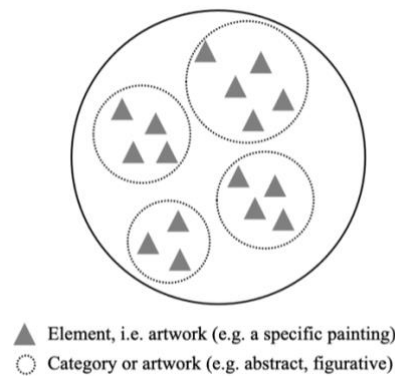
Economics is a social science that engages with the allocation of resources and is thus concerned with the optimal diversity level. Within an efficient market the level of product differentiation should match the variety of consumer needs under the assumption that consumers preferences are uniformly distributed on all categories of each form. Stirling (1998) states that “rather than advocating the wholesale ‘maximizing of diversity’ ... the message from the emerging economic and sociological literature is rather that there must be a trade-off” (p.12). Increasing diversity is a costly activity due to the foregone economies of scale and consequently the rise in production costs (Caves, 2002). In addition, creating valuable products is costly and some projects are not worth proceeding if there is not a demand. Moreover, greater variety and product information increases consumer search and transaction costs (Caves, 2002). According to this logic, and in contrast with the sociological perspective, there is an optimal level of diversity thus ever-increasing diversity is not an end in itself.

Cultural diversity differs in the cultural goods supplied and cultural goods consumed (Benhamou & Pelletier, 2007). One factor that influences the mismatch in supply in demand relates to the experience good attributes. The consumer of an experience good can only determine its utility after consumption (i.e., visit a gallery exhibition), which has implications for the willingness to pay or time investment. Moreover, there is an economic rationale to overproduce in the market for cultural goods following the ‘nobody knows’ principle (Caves, 2002). This principle relates to the difficulties to predict popularity or understand why

consumers react to certain cultural products. Thus, in contemporary art, it is likely that some artworks of a generally popular artists will never be sold and could be considered oversupply. On the other side, in certain market segments the contemporary artists create works by commissions. Although the clients' preferences and involvement will vary, the consumer has direct influence on the creation of a particular artwork.

To assess cultural diversity in contemporary art, it is crucial to understand the indicators for an increase or decrease in cultural diversity. Cultural diversity can be measured based on the variety, balance, and disparity (Stirling, 1998) of artefacts produced and consumed at a given point in time. To assess the diversity within a system (e.g., contemporary art), it must be divided into different types of categories (e.g., artworks, artists, geographical origins, artists' genders, etcetera) (see figure 1).

*Figure 1 Representation of a system and the categorization of elements (Ranaivoson, 2013)<sup>2</sup>*

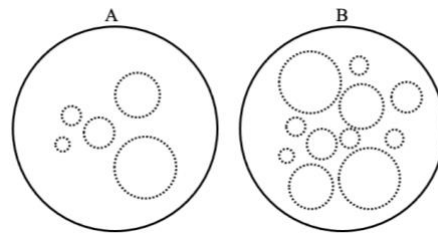


Variety refers to the number of categories into which a quantity can be partitioned, for example, the total amount of artworks or artists (see figure 2). Balance refers to the pattern of distribution in the quantity across the relevant categories, such as equal amounts of paintings, sculptures, installations, etcetera (see figure 3). Disparity goes beyond these measurement schemes by accounting for the nature of the categorization scheme and adjusting for the degree to which the categories are different from each other (see figure 4). For example, a gallery program with a Nigerian artist and a Belgian artist, all other things being equal, would be more diverse than a gallery program with a Dutch artist and a Belgian artist. This means that, in the context of the art market, an increase in the variety of paintings does not necessarily equal an increase in cultural diversity. If there is, for example, only an extensive increase in abstract paintings, then the overall diversity for paintings decreases since there is less of a balance among the different categories of paintings. Moreover, when the disparity

<sup>2</sup> Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 have been reproduced based on Ranaivoson (2013) with some changes in the design.

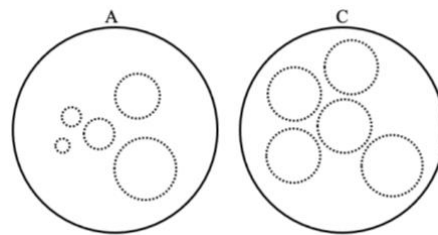
among the categories increases, for example, with the introduction of Indian art in the market for art in the United Kingdom, then diversity increases.

Figure 2 Illustration of variety (Ranaivoson, 2013)



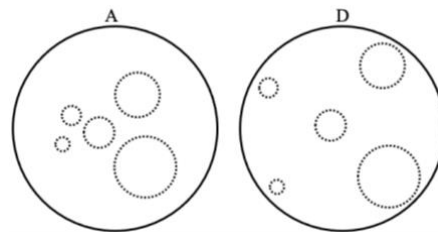
In terms of variety, 2B is more diverse than 2A

Figure 3 Illustration of balance (Ranaivoson, 2013)



In terms of balance, 3C is more diverse than 3A

Figure 4 Illustration of disparity (Ranaivoson, 2013)



In terms of disparity, 4D is more diverse than 4A

Due to the diverse systems of classification, it is difficult to standardize measurements for cultural diversity. While the diversity in contemporary art could be measured on macro (global), meso (national) and micro (firm) level, it is most insightful to understand the diversity within a national market. The variety, balance, and disparity of a cultural good is most often measured based on the artistic output and the corresponding categories (artwork: art style, artform, size, theme, topic). However, there is a lack in data availability on a broad set of artworks and a corresponding list of comprehensive detailed information. Moreover, there is a level of subjectivity involved in the categorization of an artwork. Given the close relation between the cultural output and the artist, the diversity in artist profiles and characteristics would in this instance be a better measurement of diversity in contemporary

art. Next to that, the total body of artwork represented by galleries is much higher than the number of artists that are represented.

### **2.1.3 Ecologic approach: diversity in decentralised systems**

Galleries are often micro-organisations with limited capacity (Velthuis, 2005; CBS, 2021) and represent on average 18 artists (McAndrew, 2020). The gallerists form a decentralised system that consist of many small galleries that have monopolies over the supply of a set of unique artists and their artworks that fall within a certain category (i.e., non-figurative). Thus, it is not the necessarily the behaviour of one individual gallerists, but the behaviour of the group of all galleries together that affect the cultural diversity present in the contemporary art market.

Bio-culture faces a similar decentralised system of individual decision-makers with trade-off tendencies between concentrating on few crop varieties with high returns and maintaining enough diversity to prevent the risk of generalised infection (Weitzman, 2000). Farmers have the incentive to favour monoculture-types for their profitability, while their decisions to not diversify leads to negative externalities. The lack of diversity in biocultural created through this decentralised system of individual farmers leads to negative externalities. Individual farmers encourage the development of crop-specific parasites globally if the local crop production increases. There is no automatically self-correcting feedback mechanism. The minor contribution of the individual to the total disease burden that he may be putting on others every time he makes a cropping decision cannot be traced back to the source.

As put by Benhamou and Pelletier (2007) “there is a choice between producing few books of the same type to realise economies of scale and publishing a wide variety of books of different types to guarantee the pluralism of creation” (p. 88). The publishing industry and the art market are different in the ability for unlimited reproductions and in the adoption of digital technologies. Yet, in many ways there is an overlap in the forces at play: economies of scale and need for novelty and product innovation. Artworks are often considered original and unique pieces, but within the art market there are also editions and prints, in which artists can benefit from an economy of (small) scale. Next to that, the gallerist enjoys economies of scale by specialising in a particular aesthetic that is proven to be most appealing to its loyal customer base. This decentralised system of galleries and the impact of many individual actors on diversity is important to consider. Cultural diversity in the gallery systems could function similarly to the afore mentioned farmers’ example. The primary art market consists

of various notes that together are responsible for the greater diversity within contemporary art. Not only is the gallerist a tastemaker on a local scale, as mentioned earlier, together with its peers determines the influx of artists within the cultural ecosystem (i.e., auction market and museums).

#### **2.1.4 Digitalisation and cultural diversity**

Measuring cultural diversity has been considered a mission impossible due to the lack of data availability before the rise of internet communication technologies. With the increase of digital applications in the cultural industries, cultural diversity has been researched in markets for reproducible cultural goods such as music and film (for an overview of literature on various cultural industries see Ranaivoson, 2007). The findings on the impact of digitalisation on diversity in those markets differ; Some argue that it has led to greater standardization and other studies show an increase in diversity.

Consumers have lower barriers to visit the online gallery, but also face higher uncertainty and risk when purchasing art online. However, domestic cultural artforms could be easily discovered through the internet, for example, as for the case of traditional Indian Mahbubani art (Vermeeylen & Daga, 2021). Traditional arts and crafts from remote locations could be discovered as new forms of art and commodified. Digitalisation enables consumers to buy from alternative places and learn online about other types of aesthetics. Piancatelli et al. (2020) points out that the emergence of online platforms fosters diversity, inclusiveness, and market democracy through the case of Artvisor. Moreover, the notion of reintermediation is introduced over disintermediation. This means that intermediaries continue to play a key role, but the key players might be shift to different types.

The great variety of online art platforms offers services ranging from financial advice, databases, auctions, and online shopping. Studies so far have been case studies that analysed the functioning of one platform with different business propositions. An explanation for this is that there is not much homogeneity among the purpose and operations of these online art platforms (Artprice, 2019). Some are pure providers of an online realm for existing dealers or galleries (i.e., aggregators), others are online galleries or merely functioning as an art advisor. Hiscox (2020) reports that most online art platforms are purely operating online without any plans to open physical locations (p.25). Online sales practices seem to be adopted within the low-art market segments, with a price range between 100 and 25.000 euros for a unique artwork, except for some outliers (see appendix B). In contrast to brick-and-mortar galleries,

online art platforms represent more artists and artworks. IdeelArt represents 70 artists and highlights 8 artists, Artuner represents 100 artists and highlights 9 of them, Newbloodart represents 150 artists and highlights 26 of them as award-winning, Rise Art represents 652 artists in total and highlights 22 artists. The number of artists that are represented online seems to be higher than the average in the brick-and-mortar gallery, but they do mimic the traditional gallery by putting a selected few in a premium spot on their platform. Price transparency is listed by online market participants as very important (Hiscox, 2020), but some platforms keep their prices secretive and upon request or close off the entire art platform with a password. It is also remarkable that the nationality and gender of the artists are clearly displayed, and it is easy for visitors to filter the artworks for sale based on those specifications.

The adoption of online art selling practices in the contemporary art market could lead to increased cultural diversity. However, international trade also leads to homogenisation in technologies and tastes (Chu-Shore, 2010). There is a commercial incentive for galleries to increase diversity. Expanding the multi-level strategy that mixes artists with different academic backgrounds, nationalities, gender, and career stages could be a profitable strategy. However, the perceived credibility and reputation of the gallery as an intermediary by the collectors ought not to be compromised when doing so. Social aspects, such as exhibitions, openings, art fairs are core activities of the brick-and-mortar galleries that could be included in the strategy of online galleries by hosting online openings and events. There is also potential for hybrid forms of galleries that combine a strong online presence with pop-up locations and art fair attendance.

## **2.2 Artists' career path**

The events and market participants that are involved in the artistic career of contemporary artists show the importance of acceptance by galleries for the career development. Thereafter the advantageous in the art market with a tendency towards stardom are discussed. The recent observations on diversity within the art market indicate that the artist' demographic variables such as nationality and gender influence their likelihood to become a successful and established artist are discussed as well. There is a large difference in the represented demographic profiles between fine arts graduates and artists on the secondary market. Moreover, the gallerist plays a vital role as an intermediary and tastemaker within the two-sided market. Therefore, the gallery business, the gallerist type and their decision making

related to artist selection are further explored in the third paragraph. The last paragraph explores the governmental policies to foster diversity in non-commercial cultural institutions.

### **2.2.1 Art market ecosystem**

The artist is the producer within the broader art market ecosystem that also consists of consumers, commercial- and non-commercial intermediaries. The artistic and commercial value of artworks is highly uncertain, which is why experts take on a prominent role as gatekeepers in this two-sided market. The commercial intermediaries, such as gallerists, dealers, and auctioneers, participate in the art market by matching the supplied artworks with the demands of buyers. Newly produced artworks are sold to their first owner on the primary market, and artworks that remain valuable circulate into the secondary market for resales (Velthuis & Curioni, 2015, 2015). Events occurring in the two separate markets do influence one another. For example, rising prices in secondary market are indicators of an increasing artist reputation and vice versa (Velthuis, 2005). Artworks in the secondary market are auctioned and price pre-estimates are determined (Velthuis, 2005). Artworks in the primary market are priced based on the artist reputation, size and materials used and are somewhat fixed. Commercial galleries are the central intermediaries in the primary market, while the secondary market is counselled by auctioneers. Art dealers are private individuals that can be active in both the primary and secondary market, sometimes jointly, and often take on an advisory role for collectors (McAndrew, 2021).

The artistic career is split into four phases: unknown, emerging, mid-career and established artists (Lehman & Wickham, 2014). Artists gradually move from one career phase to another based on their experiences, and thus the age of the artist is an indicator of their career stage. Emerging artists are promising artists that recently graduated and become adopted within the primary art market. Winning prestigious prizes (Lee & Lee, 2016) and the adoption of works into museum collections and the secondary market could be identifiers of a career move (Velthuis, 2005; Lehman & Wickham, 2014). Inherently, the artistic career starts at the primary art market and over time, with a growing reputation and increasing value of their artworks, take on a more prominent role in the secondary art market.

### **2.2.2 Stardom and demographic characteristics**

Stigler and Becker (1977) were the first to discuss taste formation in the arts, a notion that Adler (2006) uses to observe positive addiction to specific cultural goods. An increase in



knowledge about a specific artform, through consumption and shared experiences, stimulates appreciation of the art form. Through snowballing, some artists and artworks thus become more and more popular. A small difference in talent or quality leads to exponential returns in popularity and income. The formation of superstar in the arts also applies to the galleries (Prinz et al., 2014).

The local cultural context and the network of galleries are very crucial (Codignola, 2015). Markets are embedded in the socioeconomic context and embedded within local culture (Velthuis & Curioni, 2015; Lind & Velthuis, 2012). Purchasing patterns of consumers seem to emerge from local to global, meaning that collectors will start buying what they can relate to most, and later continue to buy outside of this scope. The national segments in the global art market are “heterogeneously composed because of national and cultural diversities” (Codignola, 2015, p.83). McAndrew (2020) reported a slight year on year global increase of 9% in foreign artist representation (pp.88-89). Curioni et al. (2015) studied the Art Basel art fair and found that there is a “predominance of western world actors, but also a successful rise of artistic production delivered by the emerging art scenes” (p.19).

The gender gap in the arts is rooted within stereotypes and prejudice. Hesmondhalg and Backer (2015) found that in the music, magazine publishing and television industries, men are less bound to rules and therefore more suitable to perform creative tasks. Females take on the supporting roles, which are linked to being stereotyped as more caring, communicative, etc. The gallery owner is also participating in a men’s world. ). Two out of three commercial gallery directors in London are male (McMillan, 2020). Given the general dominance of men in the creative industries (Snowball & Hadisi, 2020), especially in prestigious creative positions (Hesmondhalg & Backer, 2015). The art market buyers are predominantly male (Farrell et al., 2020). Global female artist representation increased to 44% (8% year-on-year increase) in the primary market (McAndrew, 2021, p.104). However, the share of women declines as the level of artist establishment increases. Cameron et al. (2019) find evidence for a “higher standards” hypothesis; Females are underrepresented at auction when compared to the percentage of female BA and BFA graduates for the but works by female artists at auction do fetch higher prices on average. Institutional barriers such as the cultural recognition of female artists in the art market is considered as “rigorous quality filters on female artists compared to male artists” (Cameron et al., 2019, p.298). Consistent with this finding, Bocart et al. (2021) found “that females comprise less than 4% of art auction sales” (p.18). However, prices fetched on auction for artworks produced by females are on average 4.4% higher than artworks by males. Potentially, this lack of representation is

to blame on the gallerist since over 50 percent of BA and BFA graduates in studio are women and yet women artists make up about 30 percent of artists represented in USA galleries.

### **2.2.3 Gallerists and entrepreneurial bias**

Commercial art galleries function to overcome information asymmetries by certifying quality (Codignola, 2015) and are situated at the beginning of the selection mechanism of the art market. The gallerist, who is influenced by economic motivations and collectors' preferences (Curioni et al., 2015), are considered tastemakers that also greatly influence the supply in the later stages of the supply chain in art. Prinz et al. (2014) shows that within this business framework, galleries choose their "supply" by promoting particular artists. The bargaining power of the artist is low, initially, and rises if the artist reputation and success in the art market increases (Prinz et al., 2014). Due to the high uncertainty in the market and the risk involved for the buyer, the reputation of the gallery is important to help collectors to overcome this. A bond is created by the gallerist and a collector's base through social events. Price discounts, for example, can be used to build or maintain loyal relationships with collectors (Komarova, 2015). The artworks and artists that are not accepted, promoted, or discovered by the gallerist has little chance of being recognised and disseminated (Hollein, 1999). Brick-and-mortar galleries and dealers active in the primary market represent 18 artists on average (McAndrew, 2020, p.89). Galleries often take on a multi-level career stage strategy (McAndrew, 2020). Supporting artists in varying career stages (i.e., emerging, mid and established) enables the gallery to invest in emerging artists through profits collected through established artists. This form of diversifying the portfolio is to represent artists in differing career phases.

According to Velthuis (2005) cultural institutions "elect and select artists from the many who seek to be represented, and promote new, innovative values that may go against the grain" (p.23). However, the assumption that novel artworks and innovative artists are favoured in the art market might be too simplistic. The cultural background of the gallerist and the taste-formation process. Creative work is often characterised by insecurity and anxiety for people who are expected to be self-motivated (Snowball & Hadisi, 2020). The lack of security in decision-making could lead to entrepreneurial bias. Bias refers to the systematic deviation from rational choice theory when people choose actions and estimate probabilities (Zhang & Cueto, 2016). These biases largely arise from cognitive mechanisms, and many biases such as availability, representativeness, the illusion of control, similarity,

local bias, the law of small numbers, status quo, and hindsight bias are found in the entrepreneurship literature.

#### **2.2.4 Cultural policies, diversity, and welfare economics**

Cultural institutions are part of the art market ecosystem yet are removed from the commercial market. Diversity is often addressed in not-for-profit cultural institutions through cultural policies. Accessibility and participation of art for all social stratification is a main concern for such publicly funded institutions. Art is exposed to non-use values such as option-, existence-, bequest-, prestige- and innovative value (Frey, 2003). These are positive externalities but are not economically supporting the market. Under the premise of welfare economics and utility maximization in society, the government intervenes to correct the market to reach social optimal utility. Governments compensate for non-use value in the arts indirectly through tax expenditure or directly through instruments such as fixed subsidy or voucher systems (Frey, 2003). Inclusivity and accessibility play a crucial role in these cultural institutions that receive public money. Intercultural dialogue is “a process that comprises an open and respectful exchange or interaction between individuals, groups and organisations with different cultural backgrounds” (Throsby, 2010, p.168). Unesco (2001) stated in their universal declaration on cultural diversity that “the cultural wealth of the world is its diversity in dialogue” (p.2). Article two highlights the importance of cultural exchange and the “harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities” (p.4). Cultural diversity is also mentioned as a factor in economic development as it widens the range of options open to everyone (article 3).

The British government focus on equality and diversity in the (1) production of art, (2) consumption of art, (3) workforce in arts, and (4) access to public and private funding for art in relation to the categories: disability, race, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, and socio-economic factors. (Arts Council England, 2013). Although the first pointer relates to equality in the participation of art production, in the entire report the term participation is used (instead of production) and is usually clustered with attendance or audience. Seemingly, even though it is listed first and perhaps as the more important pointer, there is little to no insights provided by Arts Council on the equality of professional production of art. That could be explained by the fact that the Arts Council is an arms-length body of the UK government, and therefore concerned with the aspects of the art market that are funded. If

public money is involved, the accessibility of the arts to everyone in society that contributed to that funding is therefore an important topic.

Cultural education and participation budget in the Netherlands is 23,65 million over de period 2021-2024 ([cultuursubsidie.nl/over-het-cultuurstelsel](https://cultuursubsidie.nl/over-het-cultuurstelsel)) and there is a separate body “Fonds voor Cultuurparticipatie” (which takes a cut of the budget earlier mentioned). In the United Kingdom there is one overarching body, Arts Council England, that manages the funding for the arts. Upton-Hansen et al. (2020) found that the cultural intuitions are highly aware of the lack of multi-cultural representation and are trying in a great variety of manners to address and overcome inequalities in the arts. However, the museum offerings continue to be male focused (Callihan & Feldman, 2018) and a survey study among American citizens and the museums participation show that there are great differences among race and ethnicity and the likelihood to visit a museum (Olivares & Piatak, 2021). If it continues to be a challenge for museums to attract a diverse audience, it might be more related to a lack of diversity in what is offered in museums (Kawashima, 2006).

## **2.4 Concluding theoretical remarks**

Cultural diversity, as a term, and the extent to which diversification is desired, has different interpretations of what is ought to be more central to the discussion. The optimal diversity level, the balance in supply and demand aspired from the economic perspective, or lack thereof, cannot be easily empirically evaluated due to the difficulties to objectively categorize artworks and measure disparity among categories. Next to that there is the societal and ethical stance that advocates for equal opportunities at becoming successful in the art market regardless of race, gender and other demographic features of the artist’ profile. The findings in the auction market indicate that male artists and artists with Western backgrounds are more likely to become successful and established artists, even though more females graduate from higher arts education. The assumption can be made that the supply of artworks itself is unlikely to be at an optimal level of diversity to match the diversity in demand due to this lack of diversity in artist profiles represented.

Non-commercial and commercial intermediaries in the art ecosystem have an influence on the career development of artists. Museums, gallerists, dealers, advisors, and auctioneers together form a taste-making machine that is able to include and exclude particular artists. For example, through awards and prizes, a museum acquiring specific artworks, by including an artist into a gallery program, and bringing the artworks to a

prestigious art fair. These events signal economic or artistic value and are all indicators for buyers that an artist is promising or emerging. Non-commercial intermediaries are in part reliant on subsidies and funding, which means that public money is used to pay for these institutions. Cultural diversity is therefore often addressed through cultural policies and directed towards the diversity of the participants and audiences, while the commercial intermediaries are self-sufficient and do not have to oblige to any standards to receive funding.

Commercial intermediaries potentially lack attention to the topic of cultural diversity because they are more subjected to commercial rationales and market demands. Grasping the artist selection process in galleries helps to understand the trade-offs between specialisation and diversification. Moreover, art history is of influence on the contemporary aesthetic, which is why it will be more insightful to investigate developed markets that demonstrate institutional racism and sexism.

### **3. Methodology**

This thesis investigates the role of commercial art galleries and the diversity of artist profiles represented within the contemporary art market. The first section describes the research design, followed by a detailed description of the execution of the research methods, and the final section highlights the research limitations.

#### **3.1 Research design**

Inductive reasoning is applied to understand the role of the gallerists and online art selling practices on the diversity in the contemporary art market. This research will answer the following research question: What is the role of commercial art galleries in fostering cultural diversity in contemporary art? An explorative approach is applied to grasp the influence of gallerists on cultural diversity in the contemporary art market (Bryman, 2012). Three sub-questions related to the gallery program's curation process, problem ownership, and digitalisation support the research questions. The first sub-question is: How inclusive are the curation processes and artistic programs of commercial art galleries? Sub-question two explores the self-ascribed role galleries have in fostering diversity in the contemporary art market. The question is: How do commercial art galleries view their role in promoting cultural diversity? Lastly, sub-question three is: Does the online gallery program present more diversified artist profiles? This reviews if the online gallery program presents more diversified artist profiles.

This research focuses on the diversity of artists represented in mature art markets with rich art historical backgrounds. The focus on the primary contemporary art market is to ensure that the gallerists collaborate with the living artists they include within their program, which might influence their decision making in their curation and selection of gallery artists to represent. Therefore, the sample contains gallerists and curated third-party platforms in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Ten semi-structured interviews of 65 minutes on average support the findings. The sample consists of online operating galleries in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Three main themes have emerged through a thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews.

Table 1 Overview research design

Research question	What is the role of commercial art galleries in fostering cultural diversity in contemporary art?
Sub questions	How inclusive are the curation processes and artistic programs of commercial art galleries? How do commercial art galleries view their role in promoting cultural diversity? Does the online gallery program present more diversified artist profiles?
Research method	Qualitative research (inductive and explorative)
Data generation	Semi-structured interviews
Sampling method	Purposive sampling (non-probability)
Unit of analysis	Commercial art galleries based in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands with a solid online presence and curated third-party platforms that are
Sample size	10 interviewees
Data quantity	11 hours
Methods of analysis	Thematic analysis
Data analysis	Identifying codes, themes and patterns in Atlas.ti
Themes	Equity in the art market, responsibility and appropriate measures, and bias decision-making to overcome risk and uncertainty

### 3.2 Research method

The research design has given the framework within which the collection and analysis of data will occur (Bryman, 2012). Practices in artist selection and cultural diversity perspectives have emerged from the data obtained through semi-structured interviews with art galleries. This qualitative method is rooted in interpretivistic epistemology to understand “the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants” (Bryman, 2012, p.380). Semi-structured interviews will exhaustively reveal the interviewees' behaviour patterns because it allows for personalised follow-up questions. However, the findings are not generalisable for the population. Researcher bias and participation bias is considered in the sampling method and the construction of the interview guide. In the following paragraphs, the construction of sampling, collecting, and analysing the data will be further explicated. The interview guide (see appendix A) contains mostly open questions and few closed questions. This guide functioned less as a constraint and more as a guideline to align the structure of the interviews. The interviewees have been interviewed through individual video conference calls. Participation within this research has solely been a voluntary act, and the opportunity to participate with absolute anonymity has been offered before the interview. All respondents agreed to the disclosure of their name in this final report.

### 3.2.1 Sample

Interviewees are selected through criteria- and convenience sampling. These non-probability sampling methods is helpful to connect with informative interviewees. Galleries function as a market intermediary and therefore control the supply and ought to be well-informed on demand. Within the online art market, the curated third-party platforms function as gatekeepers since they exclude market participants. As galleries and platforms have this vital role within the artistic career of artists, this is used as the unit of analysis to understand their practices and decision making. A solid online presence is a prerequisite given the potential relation of operating online and cultural diversity. The selected galleries provide extensive information about the gallery artists and exhibitions on their website and display and sell artworks online either via their online channels or third-party platforms.

The United Kingdom has been selected as the market to research since this is the largest market for contemporary art within Europe. However, due to a national lockdown till April 2021, art galleries had been closed for an extended period. The reopening of the art galleries coincided with the weeks for the data collection in this research. Therefore, various potential respondents could not participate due to time constraints. Thus, the sample expanded to galleries and platforms based in the Netherlands. The Dutch art market differs substantially in size, maturity, and infrastructure from the UK. Despite the differences, in this context, the findings in the two markets are commensurable due to the generic topic and the global online reach.

Reaching out to the unit of analysis has been done by first targeting galleries that meet the criteria. The first step was to distinguish different types of third-party platforms and become familiar with the different traits and business models (for an overview, see appendix B). Then the curated platforms located within the UK have been listed based on the Hiscox report (2020) and Google search. Finally, in the attempt to remove the personal judgement of the researcher as much as possible, a list of potential respondents has been composed by filtering on various third-party platforms for active galleries in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. In total, 76 galleries and platforms have been invited via email to participate in this research. All non-responses have received two reminders, first via email and then via a phone call. Halfway into the process, female gallery owners have been targeted due to the imbalance of gender within the sample.

The interviews took place between April and May of 2021. The data is collected till theoretical saturation has been reached, which resulted in 10 interviews of an estimated 65-minute duration that meets the formal requirements of a Master Thesis (11 hours of material,



N=10). The sample consists of third-party platforms (n=2) and gallery owners (n=8) operating through those online channels to gain an in-depth understanding of online selling practices. The respondents are in the United Kingdom (n=8) and the Netherlands (n=3). Most of the respondents are male (n=8), two respondents are females (n=2), despite the effort to overcome a gender imbalance. The author of this paper has interviewed all respondents. Each interview has been recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher the days after conducting the interview.

Table 2 Interviewees in alphabetical order

name	function	gender identity	year of birth	nationality	gallery name	employees (fte)	founded in	price segment in euros	gallery location	program	
										females	males
Ashley Cordwell	Owner	M	1988	British	Forest Gallery	3	1979	500 – 5k	Petworth	16.7%	83.3%
Ben Heslop	Owner	M	1979	British	Landmark Street Art	1	2017	50 – 45k	Carlisle	22.6%	77.4%
Eugenio Re Rebaudengo	Owner	M	1987	Italian	Artuner	2	2018	5k – 50k	London	44.4%	55.6%
Frank Taal	Owner	M	1967	Dutch	Frank Taal	2	2010	600 – 22k	Rotterdam	18.2%	81.8%
Matt David Hatwood	Owner	M	1961	British	British Contemporary Art	2	2009	400 – 3k	Cornwall	65.4%	34.6%
Michelle Gibs	Director	F	1981	Australian	Art2Arts	4	2006	50 – 5k	Portsmouth	73.3%	26.7%
Niklas von Bartha	Owner	M	1975	Swiss	Bartha Contemporary	3	2000	20k – 50k	London	39.5%	60.5%
Pieter Dobbelssteen	Owner	M	1973	Dutch	Cinnnamon	1	2015	1k – 6k	Rotterdam	20.0%	80.0%
Will Huntley-Clarke	Data analyst	M	1981	Canadian	Affordable Art Fair	32	1999	50 – 6k	London	59.5%	40.5%
Zee Levine	Owner	F	1988	Hungarian	Informality	2	2019	1k - 22k	Henley	63.2%	36.8%

### 3.2.2 Operationalization

The theory in the theoretical framework informed the interview guide (see appendix A). The guide is structured to overcome participant bias by first addressing the general gallery activities and the program and then discussing cultural diversity. The formulation of the questions and the researcher's response is neutral and non-judgemental to diminish researcher bias. Question 1 and 2 are starting questions to initiate the topic and grasp the general level of understanding of the interviewee. Questions 3 up till 8 are about the generic gallery activities such as their art specialisation, operating channels, mission, and the artists they represent. This will provide context to understand better the later answers on diversity in the artist profiles and their selling artworks. Proceeding to category 'cultural diversity', questions 9, 10

and 14 helps to understand the familiarity with the concept of cultural diversity, their perception of the level of diversity in the art market and their perspective on their contribution to this matter. Questions 11 and 13 then relate to diversity in the contemporary art market and the gallery's efforts to foster diversity. Question 12 and 16 are related to the customer profiles that the gallery attracts through online art selling. Questions 15 and 18 are about online selling practices and the influence on the types of artworks on offer. Question 17 and 19 are about changes in the artists' selection due to the increased access to information on art online. Question 20 is an open question to discuss anything preferred by the interviewee. Question 21 up until 24 are final questions to obtain basic information about the interviewee to contextualize the answers.

### **3.2.3 Data analysis**

Thematic analysis is the analysis method, which offers flexibility to go beyond the literal meanings and codes and shape and identify insightful themes (Bryman, 2012). The transcribed interviews have functioned as the data to analyse in Atlas.ti based on codes, themes, and recurrence patterns (Herzog et al., 2019). Six specific steps connected to this method were followed during the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each step is described to ensure a transparent process. To familiarise with the data, understand silences and identify difficult topics, notes and related quotes have been subtracted during the transcription process. What is not brought up by the respondent is used to assess the importance and awareness of specific related topics. By doing so, relations, patterns and meaning across and within the interviews emerged. Statements on diversity in the artistic program were cross-referenced with the information provided online. The concept of cultural diversity has not been explained upfront, yet some respondents directly asked for clarifications. The influence of that on the answers is considered when interpreting the data. Shortly after the transcription process, the documents were coded within Atlas.ti. Data-driven codes emerged and linked to each other to create categories and thematic maps (see appendix D). The initial 301 codes were merged into 36 code groups informed by theory on which themes have been formed (see appendix C). The categories that have emerged from the data analysis are crafted into clear themes. The developed themes are equity in the art market, responsibility and appropriate measures, and bias decision-making to overcome risk and uncertainty. Quotes from the interviews support the results derived from the analysis. The extracted quotes from

the interviews have been anonymised and cannot be traced back to one of the participants. The literature review contextualises these findings.

### **3.3 Limitations**

The findings of this research cannot be generalised for the unit of analysis which is an inherent limitation to the qualitative research method. The sample is limited to the low art market segment that at least in part operate online. Including higher art market segments in the research could lead to different observations and findings. The inclusion of more respondents that are part of minority groups could also lead to different findings. However, they seemingly are underrepresented in the unit of analysis. Regarding the data collection, some respondents mentioned the sensitivity of the topic discussed and might not have been able to speak as freely. Concluding, awareness of societal issues regarding cultural diversity and discrimination are ongoing processes. Carrying out this study in the future or different geographical areas will lead to different levels of awareness regarding these issues based on recent events, media coverage and the general societal impact.

## 4. Results and analysis

This section analyses the perspectives on equity in the art market. The first theme explores the central topics that the respondents pointed out in relation to cultural diversity. There are three distinct attitudes towards cultural diversity in contemporary art: indifferent, optimistic, and pessimistic. The consecutive paragraphs discuss gender equality and the tendencies to specialise in one cultural framework. The second theme explores the perception of affirmative action to increase cultural diversity, the individual contribution of gallerists to inequality and the feasibility of fostering cultural diversity in a commercial setting. Finally, theme three shows how the gallerist includes bias decision-making to overcome uncertainty in artistic quality and risk when investing in human capital.

### 4.1 Theme 1: Equity in the art market

Past and present observations and perspectives on gender, race, ethnicities, and cultural inequalities expose the perception of the gallerists on the current state of affairs regarding cultural diversity. The first part describes the **perception of cultural diversity**. Then the **dominating male gaze** is addressed. Finally, **cultural monologues and dialogues** highlight the tendencies for gallerists to specialise.

#### 4.1.1 Perception of cultural diversity

To the question *how would you define cultural diversity?* the respondents replied in the most generic way possible and referred to the representation of “all kinds of cultural influences ... within the broader cultural framework” (I8). Generally speaking, the concept of cultural diversity is not as well-known or well-defined for the participants, which became evident from their unsure replies, for example: “That is a tricky one because it is a very big question. There are a lot of possible answers” (I8). The term cultural diversity or social cohesion seems to be not commonly used by commercial intermediaries, as opposed to non-commercial intermediaries (Kawashima, 2006). Nevertheless, the respondents discussed class, race, and gender inequalities with personal insights and opinions. This demonstrates their awareness of various inequality topics. However, discriminatory practices towards the LGBTQIA+<sup>3</sup> community, people with disabilities, or other minority groups that face discrimination that the researcher did not mention, have not been brought up by any of the respondents.

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<sup>3</sup> LGBTQIA+ is an abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, aromantic, or agender, and other sexual identities such as pansexual and two-spirited.

Among the respondents, there is consensus on the elitist tendencies in the art market. The elitist tendencies in the art market have been directly addressed, for example, when one respondent said: “It [the art market] is anything but diverse, and it is exceptionally elitist.” (I1). Five out of ten respondents shared this point of view and referred to the lack of price transparency within galleries: “It was designed for people who are wealthy, really. If you have to ask how much it costs darling, then... you do not have enough money.” (I6). However, some respondents hint that the art market has become less elitist in some areas, while other layers continue to focus on the wealthier collectors. One gallery geographically distanced itself from this elitist layer, which became clear when the respondent said: “One of the reasons we set up outside of London was because there is a layer of the art world which is elitist and it is difficult to access.” (I10). Therefore, these elitist tendencies seem to refer to market participants in the middle- and high-end market with artworks priced over 50.000 euros (Radermecker, 2021). The respondents are operating in the low-market segment and distance themselves from these elitist tendencies within avant-garde galleries. Velthuis (2005) observed that “the traditional circuit present themselves as missionaries who aim at making art accessible to a large, non-elite public; they derive a sense of identity by distinguishing themselves from the snobbery of the avant-garde circuit” (p.52). However, some traits ascribed to the avant-garde gallerist are simultaneously observed, such as the long-term orientation, exclusive solo exhibitions, price discretion, and a gallery program with few exclusive artists (Velthuis, 2005). Potentially, the low-art market participants distinguish themselves from the higher segments, while the dichotomous typology continues to be present.

The perception of cultural diversity in the contemporary art market and equity of opportunities for artists regardless of demographic characteristics differs among the respondents. Three attitudes, optimistic, pessimistic, and indifferent, will be developed below and explain the different perceptions. The optimists believe that the art market is progressive in terms of diversity. This optimistic view on diversity in the art market is related to the universal language of art as a medium or the left-leaning political and social identity of the art market, which they mention is more accepting. One interviewee said: “I think it [the art market] is really diverse because creativity does not favour one race over another or one gender over another. That is what I love most about it actually, the diversity.” (I10). Some respondents connect the issue of inequality with politics and state the liberal perspective is dominant within the arts. One respondent argues that this dominant political view makes the art market more aware of inequality and said: “The arts are traditionally more left. Left is

traditionally more aware of these things, and more open to challenge them, or more accepting.” (I3). The woke-culture, which refers to being “aware, especially of social problems such as racism and inequality” (‘woke’, n.d.), is emphasized: “Artists are quite woke when it comes to the issues that would surround diversity and culture.” (I3). These respondents, most often ex-pats themselves and living in an urban area, seem to be well informed on the diversity debates within the broader society and acknowledge the Westernized and male-dominated heritage. The two believe, the art market being both elitists and diverse, coexist and build upon each other. The respondents confirm that the art market has been elitist in the past or continues to be in the higher segments, though they believe that the situation has drastically improved. This optimistic attitude towards diversity in the art market is hard to reconcile with empirical findings on diversity in the art market that report significant inequalities (Adams et al., 2017; Bocart et al., 2021; Callihan & Feldman, 2018; Cameron et al., 2019; Farrell et al., 2020; Kawashima, 2006; Olivares & Piatak, 2021). The positive perception seems to be driven by the inherent beliefs about the arts and the art market.

The pessimists believe that the art market continues to the historical elitist tendencies and lack of diversity, i.e., inherently elitist (classism), white (racism), middle-aged (ageism) and male-dominated (sexism). One respondent connects the observations to their political view. One respondent said: “I would call myself a liberal-minded person, but I would say the majority of people I know and work with are white.” (I1). This respondent draws a simplistic conclusion and generalizes the issue by saying: “That is not by design, that is just by circumstance. There is an inherent issue with that. ... That is how society is structured, and we have to do something about it.” (I1). Although the awareness on the broader societal issue, which it indeed is, the respondent shows little reflection on individual contribution or responsibility to change the current situation. Seemingly, these respondents seek external sources as explanations to understand their observations within their environment. As opposed to the optimist, their perception of diversity in the art market is rooted in personal observations, which they cannot easily reconcile with personal beliefs, resulting in a pessimistic attitude towards diversity in the art market.

Three out of the ten respondents had few personal contributions regarding diversity throughout the interview, demonstrating that their awareness or interest in cultural diversity in society or the art market is limited. These respondents are somewhat removed from the art market ecosystem and located in more rural areas. These respondents are indifferent towards cultural diversity.

#### 4.1.2 Dominating male gaze

The male gaze concept often refers to the objectification (i.e., dehumanization) of females, which art critic Berger (1972) introduced to critique the female depiction in the arts. In this research, the term literally points out the overrepresentation of males in the gallery system (gallerists, buyers, artists) and, consequently, a dominating male gaze in contemporary art. First, and despite the efforts to correct this within the sample, the interviewees are predominantly male (8 out of 10). The overrepresentation of men in the sample aligns with earlier findings on male dominance in London galleries (McMillan, 2020), the creative industries in general (Snowball & Hadisi, 2020), and creative positions (Hesmondhalg & Backer, 2015). No prevalent differences in the perspectives on (gender) equality depending on the gender of the respondent. Three respondents could not discuss or reflect on the gender gap within the art market, even when presented with some insights on the lack of female representation in art. Not due to indifference to cultural diversity in general, but seemingly these male respondents felt uncomfortable speaking on behalf of women.

The general perspectives on female artists will be analysed to review whether the gallerists believe that gender identity influences the opportunities in the art market, and if so, why. Again, there are nuances amongst the respondents in their perspective on the influence of gender on the artistic career. Six out of ten respondents stated that many excellent female artists are out there, and some highlight that they are even more successful. One gallerist, for example, said: “There are a lot of great artists that are female ... and they are as successful as their male or white counterparts.” (I7). Correspondingly, most of them state that females are not necessarily disadvantaged in the art world because of their gender identity.

However, two respondents point out that females are underrepresented in the art market, although they cannot clearly explain why. They observed that the standard continues to be male-dominated, both in the represented artists and the buyers. One respondent refers to the male status quo in shows: “Seemingly in the art world, the stats do not lie, it is still very male-dominated in the shows.” (I3). There is an emphasis on sameness and human equality regardless of gender, which conflicts with their observations on gender inequality in art. One respondent, for example, said: “There is absolutely no reason why female artists should be in any way better or worse than male artists.” (I1). When seeking explanations, whilst they acknowledge that they do not have a clear rationale for this, they refer to sexist and biological factors. Three respondents have explicitly mentioned the sexist factor. One respondent said: “There is, of course, a sexist factor to it. Men tend to buy art” (I1). The respondent projected a gender-stereotypical division of roles in buyers: “Men are the impulsive people who make

the decision of spending that kind of money. ... [W]hen we have couples buying art, it is the man who wants to do it and the female that is worried about spending that kind of money.”

(I1). Biological factors refer to the women's responsibility to bear and raise children and the lack of governmental support as self-employed persons. One respondent referred to an encounter with the career development of a female gallery artist and said:

There is a biological factor ... Her career was really starting to get going, and then at a relatively old age, she had her first child, and she consciously decided to put a stop to her career for five years to dedicate time to her child, which I thought was, a perfectly, perfectly valid thing to do. Her career has definitely suffered for that. I think these things are inherently unfair, that is just a matter of fact. (I1)

The artists represented by the gallerist together form the gallery roster or program. The gallery programs of the respondents are reflective of the gender gap. Six galleries represent fewer female (below 44%) than male artists, of which more than half (4 out of 6) have a program with a male representation over 75%. Only two brick-and-mortar galleries and the two online platforms are representing more female than male artists. The two online platforms do not utilize big data on artists' gender, but the highlighted popular artists include more females than male artists. Most interviewees lack a reflective attitude on their gallery program. Some respondents hastily concluded that the distribution between men and women in their program is quite even. A gallerist representing seven female and 24 male artists said: “We definitely have a good divide of female and male” (I3). When comparing this with the actual<sup>4</sup> gallery program, it became clear that they, in fact, do represent many more male artists. Other respondents never noticed that they predominately collaborate with male artists and came up with peculiar external justifications for the gender inequalities within their program. One of the respondents reflected upon the gallery program only during the interview and was surprised by his finding. The dialogue between the interviewee and the interviewer proceeded as followed when discussing the necessity of gender quotas:

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<sup>4</sup> The actual gallery program has been uncovered by reviewing the artist profiles on the gallery website on the same day that the interview was conducted. In the case of a split between gallery artists and exhibited artists, both have been included. The researcher has split the represented artists into female and male categories based on pronouns within the biography or the profile image. In the few instances where both were not present, it has been based upon the artist's name which was then cross-referenced with the artists' personal website. Given the large quantities of represented artists on the online platforms, the selection of highlighted (popular) artists have been used instead of all represented artists.



The art world is quite progressive. People will catch on. I would say that perhaps in the corporate world or the business world, it is a different situation. In the art world, where art institutions are already so incredibly eager to lead the way in those kinds of changes, it will happen. (I8)

*Within your gallery, what is the split between men and women?*

Ah, it is very bad, actually... there are only three women. (I8)

This epiphany led to a direct justification through external reasoning. After the insight, the respondent suggests a different masculine and feminine aesthetic, which is the cause for the over-representation of male buyers and male artists in the gallery program. The respondent said: “I work with [female artist], who makes really fantastic sort of wall sculptures. Almost all the clients are female. It is apparently an aesthetic that appeals to women more than two men. Maybe this will change if more women start buying art.” (I8). Adams et al. (2017) provided experimental evidence that the gender of the artist could not be inferred by solely looking at the artwork.

Another respondent states that his gallery is “not approached by as many female artists” (I4) and speculates that female artists are underrepresented because there are fewer qualitative female artists and because female artists are less proactive. Furthermore, the personal responsibility is downplayed by referring to agents that pre-select potential artists for the gallery: “if an agent comes and they have artworks by nine male artists and one female artist immediately, we are going to be choosing from that selection” (I4). These rather interesting statements might result from the discrepancy between their observations in their program and their self-perception. This became clear when the respondent said:

It has been something that I have thought about before. Especially when you have International Women's Day, we will obviously promote our female artists. It is one of those things that makes you aware that maybe there is an uneven split there. It is certainly nothing intentional, but it does exist. (I4)

Two respondents have mentioned international Women’s Day as a trigger to evaluate the distribution of female and male artists in their roster.

Female artists are most popular on the online platforms within the sample. However, through the interviews, it became clear that the platforms are unaware of this. The high popularity of female artists might be related to the higher standard hypothesis showed by Cameron et al. (2019). This notion informs the remarkable finding that “for galleries in the primary market, the higher the share of female artists, the lower the decline in sales” in the year 2020 during a national lockdown (McAndrew, 2021, p.85). Galleries that operate online could continue their business as usual and were not affected by the lockdown. This finding could indicate that online galleries and exhibitions represent more female than male artists. Alternatively, potentially, female artists who produce high-quality art get pushed towards lower segments and outperform male artists within these lower segments, especially if the gallerists cannot interfere with the buyers' taste and decision-making.

#### **4.1.3 Cultural monologues or dialogues**

Western countries dominate the art market (McAndrew, 2021), excluding aesthetics and narratives from cultural outsiders (Olivares & Piatak, 2021). One respondent pointed this out and said: “Art from a non-Western background has not been very prominent in the contemporary art world.” (I8). The influence of art history on contemporary art might be prevalent. However, one respondent argues that art history is set: “In the past, there were mostly white male artists being prominent in the 16th century. This is not something that now could be reversed. It is just a reflection of what society was centuries ago.” (I7).

Regardless of the generic perspective on diversity within the contemporary art market, the Black Lives Matter movement has been mentioned as a pivotal point by many respondents. Five out of ten respondents refer to events in the United States and how this ideology spread globally. One respondent highlighted the impact of this moment on the art world and said: “The BLM stuff and how that transferred into the arts, actually all over the world. George Floyd... it is easy to peg out like that stuff that's happening in America, but it was big!” (I3). Another respondent points out that, because of this, “the political landscape, the cultural landscape and the ideological landscape are shifting.” (I6).

Although the respondents are aware of the societal pressure on the topic and interested in a more inclusive program, a dialogue between various cultures within one gallery exhibition is not a prevalent idea. The galleries specialise in a particular aesthetic that develops organically, which can be best referred to as a “conceptual framework” since this can encompass various elements. One respondent explains how he models the artist program

and said: “You start at the core, ... the artists I started working with, and then I find other artists with positions that could be linked. The gaps between the positions become wider but are still held together by the core. (I8). Types of specialisations observed within the sample are, for example, a theme (e.g., environmentalism), art style (e.g., abstract), locality (e.g., local producers), visual characteristics (e.g., architectural) or value (e.g., reflective attitudes) or art form (e.g., paintings). The extent to which they hold on to this conceptual framework varies. One gallerist demonstrates this by saying the following:

I think that streets art or street culture should not be a part of my portfolio for diversity reasons. I do think that it is good that there are other platforms to focus on that, and to occasionally mixing things up or collaborating. At the same time, you should also follow your own personal interests in this matter. (I8)

It functions as an instrument to help position themselves as specialists, gain a competitive advantage, and communicate more clearly with collectors. This became clear when one respondent said: “[B]eing a very small concern, we can compete with much bigger galleries because we are so specialised. I think that is an advantage for us in this particular market that we are in today.” (I1). A specific aesthetic developed within a particular culture or geographic area is likely to develop in that direction due to taste-formation (Stigler & Becker, 1977). Quemin and van Hest (2015) showed the importance of locality and nationality on success in the art world. Therefore, within the gallery program, there is often a cultural monologue. Art fairs, for example, the Affordable Art Fair, seem to fit into a cluster specialisation (Velthuis & Curioni, 2015) and enforce these cultural monologues in the system even further.

The respondents focus on the artworks, and they supposedly would not exclude good art based on the artist’ nationality. One of the respondents demonstrates this by saying the following:

If someone points out an artist tomorrow that does the kind of work, in that field, that conceptual framework that we work with, from... The Congo. It will be really interesting to look at it. There has never been a decision about where the artist is coming from, what age they are, what sex or race they are. (I1)

However, art produced in a highly differentiated cultural setting would most likely not fit that conceptual framework. Those specialisations thus often create limitations. For example, in one instance, a gallerist specialising in contemporary British art said: “I found out that first, it was a woman and secondly, that they were not even English, but lived in England” (I2). This female Belgian artist did technically not fit the framework, but he made an exaptation. This example demonstrates portfolio diversification through variety. However, including a Belgian female in a program with predominantly British artists has a low effect on cultural diversity in terms of balance and disparity.

The respondents with more positive views on the current situation within the arts regarding inclusivity of various cultures and genders also demonstrated a more reflective attitude towards their curational role and behaviour. The variety of foreign nationalities in the gallery roster reflects the attitude of these gallerists. The curational process and the extent to which galleries are inclusive seemed to increase by their level of knowledge, understanding and the optimistic view on the current levels of diversity.

One respondent highlights the discussions on cultural appropriation, a practice that he believes is diminishing nowadays. Seemingly there is a critical perspective on cultural exchange and appropriation within the art world. He said: “[P]eople say, oh, it is the end to cultural exchange or, it is the end to being. It is not the end to cultural exchange; cultural exchange can still happen. But cultural exchange presupposes an exchange, not just an appropriation.” (I6). Two other respondents showed interest in exploring other cultural paradigms within the gallery program. One respondent said: “All kinds of cultural influences could have their place within the broader general cultural framework without being excluded based on prejudice.” (I8).

The contemporary art market consists of cultural monologues rather than dialogues. The gallerist sticks to its specialisation and would even refer its clientele to competitors if a specific request does not fit the specialisation and conceptual framework. One respondent explained this by saying that he would redirect a collector looking for art outside of his expertise, for example, if a client asks: “Can you show us work by an artist from the sub-Saharan continent?” (I1). His response would be: “I am the wrong person, but I know that there are four or five really interesting galleries here in London who are specialising in that field. They know what they are talking about” (I1). However, this scenario in which the collector seeks something specific might be unlikely since the art market deals with supply-induced demand.

## 4.2 Theme 2: Responsibility and appropriate measures

The measures undertaken by the gallerists inform this theme. Their opinion on the measures and actions taken, such as quotas in museums and the efforts undertaken within the gallery context to challenge the status quo, are evaluated. Therefore, the second theme contains three parts: first, the perspectives on **affirmative action: including by excluding**, then, the **decentralised responsibility**, and lastly, the **commercial imperatives with practical and circular** considerations.

### 4.2.1 Affirmative action: including by excluding

Affirmative action is a public or private initiative designed to equalise hiring and admissions opportunities for historically disadvantaged groups by considering the characteristics used to deny equal treatment (Block & Rockwell, 2010). Gender quotas for artworks or staffing in museums is an example of affirmative action, which could be imposed on intermediaries that rely on governmental support through cultural policy. Commercial galleries are not obliged or incentivized to diversify, but their perspective on quotas in the art world indicate what would work as a solution to overcome disproportionate specialisation in galleries.

According to the respondents, the focus on female artists in exhibitions is a trend within museums, where (solo) exhibitions revised and highlight historical artworks and female artists who have not received recognition in hindsight. However, one respondent argues that art history cannot be rewritten: “These women-only exhibitions revisiting female artists from the past and kind of reassessing where their work is. I would say the majority of it is a complete waste of time. It is awful. ... You cannot go back and rewrite history.” (I1). He is critical about the top-down push for diversity in cultural institutions, which became clear when he said: “Curators and institutions are being told to do so many things to comply with issues like cultural diversity. The end result of that is detrimental.” (I1). Detrimental, because in his opinion great museum collections are created if curators are trusted by those that financially supported. He argues that interference of such social objectives on the program harms the quality: “Trying to impose some kind of program of cultural diversity is unfortunately, as much as the intention is good behind it, is detrimental to the quality of work that is being shown.” (I1). Opposingly, another respondent believes that this top-down approach creates a trickle-down effect into the contemporary art market. She argues that “museums having a focus on cultural diversity is really great” (I10), because “museum shows

are kind of pinnacle for an artist career. If there is more diversity within that, then I feel that this will continue to filter down towards all different areas of the ecosystem.” (I10).

The respondents regard quotas as artificial, which they are, and disingenuous. One gallerist of which the gallery program predominantly consists of female artists points out that this was not on purpose: “I did not make the choice to do that. That is, for me, where it becomes disingenuous; When you force cultural changes because you feel that you are ticking a box.” (I2). There is a firm belief among the respondents that gender quotas in contemporary art lead to a situation in which people end up in positions they do not deserve. For example, the exclusion of great male artists:

There is also an element of exclusiveness in this [gender quotas]. Suddenly, if you are white male artists of 45 years old or something, working very hard to have made a career out of their art, then they at this point, I feel that they feel excluded in programming and in prizes. (I9)

Likewise, another respondent fears the inclusion of female artists that produce low-quality artworks. He specialises in non-figurative art and provides one specific example of a female artist that is, in his opinion, overrated:

There is an artist in our field that is working with Lisson Gallery who did phenomenally or still does phenomenal. ... I do not want to undermine her in any way, but her work is of third or fourth-rate<sup>5</sup>. There are many more interesting constructivists female artists than her, but because she has a huge oeuvre and was taken up by a big gallery, her pieces are selling for hundreds and hundreds of thousands. She gets included in every exhibition about geometric abstraction, and it is just really pointless work. (I1)

This value judgement suggests that the gallerist believes that he can identify which artist is significantly more talented than another artist. As if the supply can be lined up from best to worst, while it is more likely a pool of talent with a variety of traits from which they select. Moreover, this demonstrates the strong influence of galleries as a tastemaker. However, eventually, as a market participant, those artworks and artists in demand are suitable for that

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<sup>5</sup> Third or fourth rate refers to an inferior and poor quality of the artwork which is of negligible worth.

position. The respondents seem to believe that quotas result in selecting artists based on the one criterion of being part of a minority group. One respondent, for example, said: “I am not going to accept some people if I think their work is not very good, just because they may fit a certain category.” (I5). In this instance, gender becomes the only selection criteria, which is a misconception since all standard criteria should be retained. The focus on the demographic characteristics in quotas seems to reduce the objective to that part only, even though they rightly believe that this does not determine one’s ability to excel in creating artworks.

Some respondents believe that gender quotas are not ideal but necessary to get to change the status quo. For example, one respondent said: “I think it [gender quota] is a bit exaggerated, but maybe that is really what is actually necessary at this moment to get to a new vantage point” (I9) – needed because natural selection minorities remain underrepresented, and not ideal, because of the earlier mentioned fear of disingenuous motives and the lack of better alternative solutions.

The gallerists do not feel personally responsible for combating the lack of equity in the art market. However, the idea of receiving a subsidy to foster inclusivity is something that nine out of ten respondents were open to, depending on the eligibility requirements. Including some quota system within their program would not be considered. Soft tools would be preferred, but the respondents cannot suggest any clear solutions. One respondent, for example, said: “It has to be just a mindset. It is an easy mindset to propagate because I am not fighting against anything. I am not thinking, I do not like those female artists, but I should probably pick a few.” (I3). Another gallerist was already researching the opportunities to receive funding for a no-sales exhibition on environmentalism.

#### **4.2.2 Decentralised responsibility**

The gallery system is a decentralised network of specialised micro-organisations. For example, in the Netherlands, there are 770 galleries, of which 95% has one or two employees (CBS, 2021). Their financial resources, and consequently the capacity in terms of staffing, remains limited. Even in more prominent galleries, there seems to be a limit to its growth potential since the founder and owner remain central to the organisation. Velthuis (2005) points out that many galleries cease to exist after the owner's death, and the employees might go on and start a new gallery. The central role of the owner in galleries will be further expanded on in the next theme, but first, it is essential to understand how this decentralised system can promote cultural diversity.

Due to the size of the gallery on its own in a broader gallery system (and even greater art market), they feel that their contribution to inequality is negligible and deem their opportunities to prevent further inequalities as insignificant. “I am not influential enough to be pushing it on a wider scale.” (I3). The responsibility is pushed, again, towards external participants, for example, to blue-chip galleries: “The gatekeepers will be the people who are running the big sales, the big shows and the big, big displays, and it is down to them.” (I3). However, they do express critiques on the proactive approaches by well-known galleries and peers. There is again a fear of disingenuous motives to foster diversity. One respondent illustrated this when he said: “David Zwirner opening a gallery for only black artists ... is the crudest and most ill-advised thing to do. I think it is such a transparent thing. (I1). Especially these respondents who are pessimistic on the current diversity levels and are critical of current measures overlook their contribution to this.

As a micro-organisation, there is no need for structured company policies. One respondent said, “I can make my own rules. ... There is no company policy, there is no master plan. There is no you cannot, it is only would you like to, and shall we?” (I3). The lack thereof also makes the entrepreneur sensitive to bias decision making (Zhang & Cueto, 2016). In this small setting, the gallerist is not that likely to be held accountable for their decisions by customers, colleagues, or peers. “The advantage of being a micro business is that I am only answerable to myself.” (I3). Diversity seemingly is not a topic discussed with peers: “I did not talk about this topic to different gallery owners saying like, hey, your roster is very one type” (I9). However, if there is a called out on their lack of diversity, this can significantly impact the gallerist. One of the gallerists points out that the lack of diversity in his roster was brought to attention by one of his gallery artists:

I had quite a heated but interesting conversation with one of the artists that I work with. In fact, he is Scottish, white, male, not 45, but I think 36 or 38, something like that. He had a problem with my roster, because he felt like it is too white, male, etcetera. We had long discussions about this. (I9)

This established artist can afford to speak up and risk the potential of rejection due to the accumulated bargaining power (Prinz et al., 2014). The artist has eventually decided to



terminate the collaboration with this gallery<sup>6</sup>. The call-out and the discussion that followed triggered a reflective attitude in this instance. The gallerists point out that it has become an active part of the selection process: “In the back of my mind, because of these discussions that I had, it did start to play a role. Oh, but she is Brazilian, and she is female. Well, that is a plus.” (I9).

A reflective attitude towards their programming, whether stimulated externally or through an internal process and having the clear objective to curate an inclusive program seems crucial. Three respondents have demonstrated this attitude. One gallerist has a personal objective: “If, next year or a year after, I look back at my roster and there is actually some more diversity in it, I think I would feel good about myself. (I9)”. Some respondents explicitly mention their effort to overcome their bias. One respondent said: “I try to work in the most unbiased way, I try to identify what I believe are the most talented artists.” (I7). He does so by focussing on the artwork instead of the artists: “I like the arts to speak for itself, and I say is this an artwork that I connect with, let me try to understand what the artist is trying to say.” (I7). This attempt at unbiased curation reflects a higher level of gender equality in his gallery program. Of all respondents comes closest to an even distribution between female (44.4%) and male (55.6%) artists (N=9). However, the exhibited artists (N=105) are skewed similarly to the male dominance observed in the other galleries, with 74.3% males and 25.7% females. Counterintuitive is the finding that these two proactive respondents are optimistic about how the contemporary art market addresses cultural diversity in general.

#### **4.2.3 Commercial imperatives: practical and circular**

The selection process is seeming to be primarily related to the commercial goals. A gallery is a commercial firm even if it operates under the art for arts' sake motive. The gallerists are concerned with the practical implications of the cohesive programming they do, which relates to the amount of time, wall space and other resources they can dedicate to the various artists whilst ensuring that overheads are covered. The size of the gallery limits the expansion of a broader gallery program. One respondent said: “We are very small, we do not have limitless time, and we want to be able to ensure that all the artists we are representing get our full attention” (I10). Other respondents also affirm this. For example, one gallerist said: “You

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<sup>6</sup> The termination of the collaboration has not been mentioned by the interviewee itself but has been confirmed by the artist in question. The extent to which the diversity in the gallery has influenced this decision is unclear.

have to be confident that you can provide what is needed. If there are too many sitting on the couch, then you are not doing a good job.” (I9). These requirements are partly related to available gallery space. One respondent said: “If they are ready for it, at least you have a solo every two years or something, and there are just limited time slots in the gallery.” (I9). The efforts to manage the relationship, which depends on the individual artist and their career phase, are also considered. Emerging artists often require higher maintenance, which is why they focus on a mix of career stages: “There is a mixture in how far they are on their path of development. Just to have some young artists, some in mid, mid-career and some yeah, that are established.” (I9). This maintenance required by the variety of artists in the program determines whether there is room for expansion. The gallerists would evaluate the available resources when considering expanding the gallery program: “Do we have space to exhibit? Do we have the time now to dedicate? It is quite a big process to bring on a new artist.” (I4). The online gallery spaces are unlimited, and a robust online presence also influences the importance of the physical location. Two respondents have recently relocated to a more extensive gallery space outside the gallery district. Even though these new locations provide more wall space, these galleries are not likely to expand their program. There is no productivity increase in managing the artists' relationship, so the online gallery does not expand the number of gallery artists.

The buyers and collectors that are attracted to the gallery do influence the gallerist in its program curation. Whether they have a market or can develop a market for specific artworks influences the decision to take on the artist. One respondent addresses this by saying: “I am starting to see the urgency of having artists whom I can actually develop a market for. I have been working a lot with artists who make installations and sculptural interventions, which is almost impossible to sell.” (I8). Commercial imperatives make the gallerist serve the market and supply what is in demand. However, they are tastemakers in a market with supply-induced demand (Velthuis, 2005). One gallerist that has an exceptional male-dominated roster said: “There is not a lot of cultural diversity amongst our buyers. They are usually people who have already been quite wealthy for a few generations.” (I8). Although their demand might not influence them all that much in the artist selection, there is truth in the circularity of diversity in supply and demand. If the offerings are very specialised, this will likely appeal to a narrower audience. One respondent that solely operates online emphasizes this: “Algorithmic selling techniques, which does not have to be designed by a computer for that algorithm to take over, carry on bringing more of what sells best. ... That process does not just curate our marketplace. It curates our audience.” (I6). Online data

accessibility provides insights into the demand, informing the gallerist in a more rational decision-making process. However, the brick-and-mortar galleries are not accustomed to such commercial practices and do not use customer data. It would be interesting since this data can help to overcome entrepreneurial bias.

### **4.3 Theme 3: Bias decision-making to overcome uncertainty and risk**

Most of the gallerists, both the optimist and the pessimist, believe that addressing inequality and increasing diversity is a good cause. Nevertheless, only three galleries are trying to become more inclusive, and in general, the rosters deliberately specialise in one aesthetic and artist profile. How could this conflict between desire and behaviour be explained? The artists are the biggest asset for the gallerist in which they invest their resources. Moreover, the gallerists make such investment decisions under high uncertainty and high risk. This theme explores how gallerists deal with such curatorial decisions. The following two topics explain this theme: the **curation based on personal tastes** and, the **long-term collaborative potential**.

#### **4.3.1 Curation based on personal taste**

From the interviews, it becomes clear that the personal taste of the gallery owner is of great importance in the selection process. Eight out of ten respondents have emphasized the influence and importance of personal taste. For example, one respondent (I1) said, “We tend to work with artists whom we would if we could collect ourselves”. Another respondent confirms this by saying: “My curatorial role, that is where we bring the fire because I cannot pay for this stuff.” (I3). A gallery owner that is within the field for over sixteen years believes that this is the main differentiating factor for a gallery, which became apparent when he said: “What distinguishes one gallery from another is the taste of the of the gallery owner who chooses the artists” (I9). Velthuis (2005) argues that the role of the gallery owner is so central, to the extent that “as a result of this pivotal role played by the founder of the gallery, the long-term continuity of art galleries is problematic ... once the founder of the gallery retires or dies, the gallery often withers away” (p.17).

There is high uncertainty in the selection of artworks. There are no set criteria to identify what is and what is not good art. Therefore the gallerists identify artworks and artists that are worthwhile. Besides their taste, what are the metrics used to identify promising artists and good artworks? The approach of the gallerist is to follow their gut instinct when selecting

the artworks and artists with whom they want to work. To the question *how do you identify a good artwork?* they said: “I think it is almost a gut instinct. That you just see something, and you know.” (I4) and “From my gut and my personal taste.” (I9). One respondent even indicated that: “You cannot put any empirical kind of criteria for this [artist selection]. ... Quite honestly, at the beginning when we started the gallery, we tried to be very strategic about it, but that does not work.” (I1).

Since the program is a direct reflection of the taste of the gallery owner, conflict might arise when the factual observation on the diversity within the program does not match their self-perception. This explains the earlier mentioned external reasons that justify the specialised supply (section 4.2.2). Moreover, critical reviews or comments on the gallery program might be perceived as a personal attack on the taste of the gallery owner. In the instance where the artists called out one gallerist, it was a triggering event: “Those discussions, in the beginning, were quite confronting, and then I felt a bit attacked. Like... What? Are you calling me a racist?” (I9). Even though the galleries' programs are specialised and the artist profile relatively homogeneous, no intentional discriminatory practices were present in the sample. The gallerist is not aware of the one-sidedness and does not consider themselves as closed-minded or racist: “As if I would make choices on gender and race, this is completely not true.” (I9). The artworks are essential, the condition *sine qua non*. If the artworks are not of interest, then the artist is not considered: “I have chosen art, and to work with artists, based on my own tastes and what I fall for in art. The person behind it comes next.” (I9). The gallerists can therefore easily hide behind this notion of “personal taste” and use this as an argument not to include diverse voices:

I am not going to apologise; I choose my artist because of what my eye is caught by, and what I like, or what my taste is. That is how I choose. I am not going to go on the road like, oh, let us find a black female artist who is a lesbian or something, and cross-eyed and in a wheelchair. (I9)

According to Bourdieu (1984), the social class one belongs to is based on educational and financial classes. The combination of educational class, financial class and even the job of one's father divides those that recently acquired wealth from the ones with more traditional values and cultural norms. In turn, this social class determines the culture one is consuming and forms the taste of the individual, which explains why the taste of the white western gallerist is forged as such.

In contrast to the small-scale operation, it becomes clear that on a larger scale (at the online curated art platforms), there is a certain detachment from the art and artist itself. One respondent explicitly mentions that “different art speaks to different people.” (I6). The online platforms are, due to the larger size and higher number of artists that they would need to go through, operating in a more structured manner. Standard application forms and procedures provide more equal opportunities since every artist that applies is considered. Moreover, this leads to high application rates, and therefore the approval process also consists of multiple people. Therefore, personal taste becomes less decisive on this larger scale. One respondent that runs an online art platform said: “Obviously, art is very personal. Some people like them, some people do not. I might not necessarily choose to have it on my wall, but that does not mean that it is not a good piece of work” (I5). Hence, the programs at the online platforms are not curated based on personal taste, which might be the reason for the greater female representation.

#### **4.3.2 Long-term collaborative potential**

Intuitively, the gallery operations would not be described as a risky business because the gallerist does not create any physical outputs or even purchase the works from the artists before selling them. However, the gallerist invests its resources into a long-term relationship from which both the gallery and artist can benefit. Therefore, the stakes for deciding which artists to work with is a complex but essential task that is central to the gallerist and the gallery's longevity. One respondent, for example, said: “The artist is the most important thing. Without our artists, we would not have a gallery.” (I10). Thus, the gallery artist relation is more significant than the gallery collector relation, which one respondent clarifies by saying: “We are more oriented towards artists, for us good the priority is really, making artist happy and giving them opportunities” (I7). However, the additional value of the artists should be clear as well to ensure that the investments will recuperate: “You have to invest a lot and establish they can also bring something to the gallery.” (I9).

Most respondents have emphasized that they envisage a long-term relationship with the gallery artists. One respondent said: “We will only represent someone if we really see a long-term relationship with that person and that we can give them the amount of time that is required to help grow their career, and, and work together.” (I10). The gallerists invest into the career of that artists and want to benefit from their growing reputation (Prinz et al., 2014), thus creating long-term collaborations with the artists is rational behaviour. There is a

continuous risk that an artist discontinues their attachments to the gallery, although the respondents have not directly mentioned this. In the earlier stages of the collaboration, especially for emerging artists, the gallerist needs to make upfront investments before receiving any profits. Artists that decide to terminate the collaboration would create sunk costs for the gallery.

Personal relations, likability, and connection between the gallerist and the artist are crucial, potentially because this personal bond makes the artist more trustworthy to the gallerist. The element of likeability is expressed, for example, when one of the respondents said: “It is really important that we have a very close relationship to them as well. We would only work with people that we really like.” (I10). Another respondent said: “There must be a click between the artist and myself because it is difficult enough what we do.”(I9). This close personal relation helps to ease the collaboration process: “It comes down to do you work well together? Do you communicate well? And is there an energy that this will be good for both people involved?” (I10). The relationship compares to a family bond: “The artists that you represent are kind of like your family.” (I10). Supposedly the likeability of an artist is not influenced by their cultural background: “[A]s long as they are good people, and we can get along, I do not care who they are, or what colour or creed (I3). There is also an element of trust to this: “It can be quite a close working relationship, not in all cases, but there must be sort of a basis of trust, and it must feel good.” (I8). Poor relations are more likely the cause of failed collaborations than a lack of qualitative artworks. One respondent pointed this out and said: “I have worked with quite a few artists in the past that I am not working with anymore. That was never about their work. Let me put it that way.” (I8). The gallerists assess the artist's ease of collaboration and trustworthiness to ensure the long-term relationship and thus reduce the risk that their investments are suddenly lost.

Online art platforms are also curating their supply but are operating on much larger scales. The objective is to keep both artists and buyers on the platform. The profitability and productivity of the platform do not rely on individual artists relations but on how well the platform itself operates. Therefore, these third-party platforms do not invest in human capital but in the platform itself. Due to the larger scale on which the art platforms operate, they have made some changes while still curating the supply. Online the gallerists can get in touch with artists that would otherwise remain unknown: “The online gives more opportunity to be open-minded and discover artists from all over.” (I7). “If you see a few other artworks from the same artist that I like, I will try to get in touch and develop a conversation from there” (I7). However, establishing relationships with artists through digital tools has its limitations.

For example, “If they are in the same time zone, you know, it is easier to do a good work with them if there are 12 hours’ time zone difference, you know. For simple non-logistical reasons” (I7). One gallerist will specialise their artist program towards the UK and Europe due to these limitations have resulted for one gallerist: “We are going to look to represent more artists who are either European based or UK based because it is difficult to have people in loads of different time zones, and also having the work shipping the work over, you know, there is a range of costs associated with that as well.” (I10).

## **5. Discussion**

The rational behaviour of the gallerist leads to specialisation rather than cultural diversification. The tendency for galleries to specialise is consistent with the observations on the homogeneous artist' demographic profiles present at art fairs (Curioni et al., 2015), auctions (Bocart et al., 2021; Cameron et al., 2019; Farrell et al., 2020), and museum exhibitions (Callihan & Feldman, 2018). This section draws connections between the findings and the direct influence of cultural diversity within the commercial art gallery (section 5.1). Section 5.2 describes the influence of individual specialisation on the national and global market for contemporary art.

### **5.1 Diversity within micro-organizations**

Galleries are micro-organisations in which the gallery owner (i.e., dealer or gallerist) takes on the central role in the decision-making process. The selection of gallery artists is an example of such an important activity because the gallerist adds market value through its curatorial and educational role (Velthuis, 2005). The gallerists curates based on four prerequisites: personal interest in the artists' oeuvre, the aesthetic fits the conceptual framework, the artist is considered trustworthy, and the estimated maintenance matches the available resources. The personal preference of the gallerist is thus directly reflected in the gallery program.

The decision-making informed by the gallerists personal preferences influences cultural diversity in two ways. First, the theory on taste-formation predicts that gallerists will prefer somewhat familiar artworks (Stigler & Becker, 1977). Thus, this leads to the exclusion of artworks created by artists in cultural contexts that significantly differ from the dominant aesthetic. Second, the gallerists seek artists that they can trust and collaborate with, and therefore the gallerist will favour like-minded artists (Zhang & Cueto, 2016). People that share various characteristics are more likely to have similar interests and world views (Zhang & Cueto, 2016). Thus, gallerists favour artists with similar cultural backgrounds and become more specialised in one aesthetic even though novelty is crucial in qualitative art (Prinz et al., 2014).

Why does the gallerist rely on this seemingly irrational type of decision-making based on intuition and personal judgement to such a great extent? First, the gallerist is an entrepreneur in a market where the entry barriers are low (Prinz et al., 2014). There are no official requirements, but there are also no standard market practices that guarantee success leading to low longevity of low-segment galleries and a diminishing pipeline of new gallery



openings (McAndrew, 2020). Second, opening a gallery is a risky business, and the type attracted to doing is, projects a particular personality (Snowball & Hadisi, 2020). Third, the process of artist selection is intuitive, and due to the lack of human capabilities to rightly process information, the decisions are likely to be rooted in entrepreneurial bias (Zhang & Cueto, 2016). Applicable biases are the similarity bias, which refers to the tendency “to evaluate more positively those who are more similar to themselves”. Then, the illusion of control bias makes the gallerist overemphasise how much their skills attribute to their success instead of sheer chance (Langer 1975 in Zhang & Cueto, 2016, p.427). Moreover, the status quo bias refers to the tendency to “repeat a previous choice overly often” (Samuelson & Zeckhauser 1988 in Zhang & Cueto, 2016, p.427). These three biases would lead to a more specialised artist program.

Gallerists are not purposively contributing to the low degrees of diversity in the arts. However, there are no alternatives to relying on gut feeling in their decision-making which leads to subconscious discrimination and specialisation. While continuing these practices, a reflective attitude and awareness of personal bias can help mitigate (Walton, 2016). Those optimistic about the current level of diversity in the art market have demonstrated this reflective attitude and present a more diverse gallery program. However, this optimism is rooted in a misconception of facts because studies show that white, middle-aged males continue to dominate the art market (Cameron, 2019; Quemin & van Hest, 2015). The pessimists agree with these market observations but seek external justification for why their gallery program lacks diversity and does not demonstrate a reflective attitude on their contributions to this.

The gallerists take on the expert position for buyers and artists. Moreover, there is a lack of interaction with peers. Confrontations with externals on one-sided gallery programs are thus uncommon, and the reflective attitude is not easily triggered. If someone critiqued the gallery roster, the gallerist would be sensitive to this since it reflects their taste and is, therefore, a personal critique. The gallerist is unreflective on their contribution to inequalities in the art world. There is no automatic self-correcting feedback mechanism because a one-sided supply attracts a one-sided audience. Finally, a lack of diversity among the collectors reinforces cultural monologues since the market demands stimulate the entrepreneurial bias on what is easy to sell or has proven itself to be popular. These factors lead to a specialised gallery program that is not inclusive, favours specific artists’ and buyers’ profiles that seem most fit to the gallerist that will remain if not compelled to change.

## 5.2 Negative externalities in a decentralised market

On a global scale, some art markets<sup>7</sup>, such as the USA, UK, and China, are more developed and dominate the art world (McAndrew, 2021). However, the art market is not considered global due to the importance of context and localities (Velthuis & Curioni, 2015; Vermeyleen, 2015). The development of an art market correlates to the country's economic stability (i.e., size of the middle class) (Lind & Velthuis, 2012; Velthuis & Curioni, 2015). Many aspired artists in poorer countries have low opportunities in their home market. Therefore, it is unlikely that the art market will represent a great variety of nationalities on a macro level.

The specialisations on the firm-level could still collectively create a diverse national art market if these specialisations attract a variety of artists and artworks. However, the tendency for commercial galleries to specialise leads to negative externalities. Even if the conceptual frameworks differ significantly, most favour a similar artist profile. The great influx of homogenised market participants (artists) in terms of age, gender, race, and supply (artworks) strengthens the stereotypes and prejudice held towards artists. Moreover, the gallery system consists of various micro-organisations with limited growth potential. The exclusion of artist with specific demographic characteristics by one gallerist bears a negligible fraction of the total inequality burden. Affirmative action such as quotas could be efficacious to counterbalance this type of market failure, which requires enforcement or incentives through public authorities (Cuyler, 2013). Public expenditure for commercial galleries would be highly controversial given the financial self-sufficiency. However, one could argue that the one-sided aesthetic in the contemporary art market circulates into museums. The museums continue to receive funding to attract a more diverse audience despite the low success rates due to the change in presentation rather than product (Kawashima, 2006; Olivares & Piatak, 2021).

The findings in this research reflect the low art market segment. The middle- and high art market that operate on a larger scale might have different decision-making practices leading to other diversity outcomes. Moreover, the market leaders in those segments have close relations with cultural institutions where cultural diversity is a priority. Potentially, reputable galleries could set market standards for diversity which will be then “followed by experts, collectors, and museums” (Crossland & Smith 2002 in Prinze, 2015). However, the galleries that address higher price ranges are limited in the artists they can select since their

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<sup>7</sup> This refers to the traditional and Western standards of an art market with an established ecosystem.

buyers have investment motives (Radermecker, 2021). The low segments are freer to select any artist profile they would like to include since reputation is less important.

The more inclusive gallery could be less productive than its competitor, presenting a more complex program for the dominant group of collectors. Though cultural diversity itself can become a specialisation, a conceptual framework in which cultural elements are overlapping and conflicting to create cohesive narratives. The current market situation provides the business opportunity for alternative newcomers to step in and speak to current overlooked potential buyers.

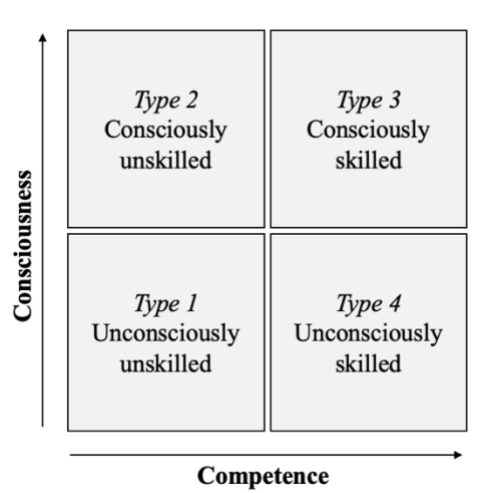
### **5.3 Typology based on consciousness and competence**

Velthuis (2005) builds upon Bourdieu (1984) in distinguishing the traditional gallery circuit from the avant-garde circuit. Based on the findings in this research, this seems to be a spectrum rather than a dichotomy. Making art accessible to a large, non-elite public, distinguishing themselves from the avant-garde circuit's snobbery supposedly is an identifier of the traditional galleries and the idealistic approach towards art to the avant-garde type gallery (Velthuis, 2005). However, there was no clear demarcation between these types among the respondents, although the various elements are present. Thus, the different perspectives on diversity in the art market do not relate to those identifiable characteristics, such as commercial or non-commercial galleries. However, those opinionated on cultural diversity (either optimistic or pessimistic) were the galleries located in urban areas. That aligns with the idea that greater exposure to various cultures helps to overcome negative stereotypes and prejudice (Pettigrew & Trop, 2006; Walton, 2016). Thus, cultural diversity is of greater interest to galleries in diverse cities, but inclusive curation cannot be ascribed to a particular gallery or personal trait.

The different approaches to cultural diversity do not fit within the existing typology. Therefore, four types are developed to apply the findings in a practical setting and help gallerists become more inclusive in their program curation. These types relate to the levels of consciousness and competence (Maslow, 1954) involved in discovering and acquiring new competencies. The first phase, unconscious and incompetence, refers to the state that the person is unaware of the potential competency. Next, the person becomes aware of their lack of competence; They are conscious and incompetent. Then, the person starts to train this competency consciously and becomes consciously and competent. After a while, the person

becomes used to that level of competence and can perform without requiring much conscious attention. Then, the person is unconsciously competent.

Figure 5 Four types of galleries based on consciousness and competence to foster inclusive program



This theory is applied to demonstrate how the various types can become competent in inclusive curating their gallery program. However, the levels differ somewhat, given the importance of continuous consciousness to overcome potential bias. In a sense, this typology relates to the model by Merton (1949) on prejudice (believes) and discrimination (behaviour). However, an external observant can hardly judge whether the respondent is prejudiced or discriminatory. The level of consciousness relates to the ability of the gallerist to recognize that bias (awareness of prejudice) informs their actions. The level of competence relates to overcoming potential bias in curation (ability to overcome discriminatory practices). The mix of (un)consciousness and (in)competence create a diagram of four distinct types in their behaviour towards cultural diversity in the art market. The individual types and practical solutions per type are developed below.

### 5.3.1 Type 1: Unconscious incompetence (I1, I3, I4, I8)

The first type is unconscious of the potential biases and thus incompetence in overcoming them. External events such as International Women’s Day or the Black Lives Matter movement result in a reflection on the gallery program. However, awareness of the social diversity debates and the lack of equal opportunities in the art market or contemporary art are not indicators of being conscious of a personal bias. Although this awareness is helpful, this does not always result in responsibility or accountability because they do not perceive themselves to be bias or prejudiced (sexist or racist). Instead, they are quick to ascribe the

homogeneity to external events such as the inherent differences between groups or the market demands. This type has a high potential to become more inclusive if they become reflective of how their biases influence their decision-making. Shared experiences and interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds can foster a self-critical attitude. Practical solutions such as city art tours, network events could be fostered through art associations or the local authorities to lower the barrier for outsiders to visit the art bubble. Shared experiences on various topics through social media and online talks can be helpful, potentially organized in collaboration with museums.

### **5.3.2 Type 2: Conscious incompetence (I9)**

A call-out in the close external surrounding of the gallerist can force a trigger the consciousness of the potential bias. For example, when an artist decides to leave the gallery due to a lack of diversity in the program. Such a call-out is likely to be perceived as a personal attack, and some initial resistance will be present if the factual observations are not corresponding with their self-perception (Zhang & Cueto, 2016). However, discussing the topic thoroughly on various occasions could lead over time to a mindset change. Overcoming the fear of their own bias helps the gallerist to curate a more inclusive program. While the artistic value remains most important, the artists' characteristics take on a more central role in the decision-making. Artists from differing backgrounds become the ones in the advantageous position instead of the typical white male. This type of call-out requires a close relation to be critical and reciprocated. The practical solution to foster this would be to address inequality and diversity topics in arts education. Social media accounts that expose discriminatory practices in specific galleries could be helpful but not as potent due to the small scale of the organisations.

### **5.3.3 Type 3: Conscious competence (I7, I10)**

Those consciously competent have adopted a reflective attitude towards their programming and are aware of potential biases. The need for diversity seems part of their values. However, this does not necessarily mean that they are aware of the inequality within the art market perse. Moreover, the level of urgency regarding diversity differs. Generally, the consciously competent ones have a more optimistic view of diversity in the arts, which could be related to the environment in which they operate or their personal contribution and effort to make the art market more diverse. This type would be interested in opportunities to become more

inclusive, for example, through subsidies on non-sales exhibitions that could provide the opportunity for the gallerist to experiment outside of their general scope. However, the bureaucracy involved in applying for subsidies might be a daunting task that the entrepreneurial gallerist does not enjoy.

#### **5.3.4 Type 4: Unconscious competence (I2, I5, I6)**

Consciousness is crucial to overcome bias for the gallerist that operates on a smaller scale. Those who are unconsciously competent are not purposively adjusting their behaviour to overcome a bias, nor are they always aware of diversity. However, the online art platforms that operate on a larger scale have systems that foster diversity. First, to deal with the larger scale, they have a structured selection process in place. Applicants are delivering their portfolio in the same format. Those equal opportunities help to diminish homogeneity. This type does not rely on individual artist relationships due to the more extensive offering in artworks. Even if the gallerist does not personally favour a particular artwork, they believe that someone else would like to buy it. In addition, the automatic data generation on consumer preferences, sales and popularity on an online platform provides proof and guidance for more inclusive curation. Structured artists application and review processes could help to lower the bias of the gallerists that operate on more minor scales. However, such practices would not align with the exclusivity and specialism signals they portray.

## 6. Conclusions

The individual gallerists benefit from increased specialisation and the inclusion of unconscious discriminatory practices, which is the key finding of this research. The gallerists select gallery artists based on (1) personal interest in the artists' oeuvre, (2) the aesthetic fit within the conceptual framework, (3) the trustworthiness of the artist, and (4) the estimated maintenance in comparison to available resources. The personal taste and creation of one conceptual framework in artwork curation help the gallerist overcome the high demand uncertainties. The trustworthiness and estimated maintenance are essential because the gallerists invest resources in artist to foster a long-term relationship. However, the artists could terminate the collaboration whenever they please. The gallerists are therefore sensitive to entrepreneurial bias.

The brick-and-mortar gallery does not expand or diversify if they operate online due to the lack of productivity increase in the artist relation management. Galleries that solely operate online and have a solid platform enjoy economies of scale. In this instance, the curated program becomes more diversified because the gallerists are not reliant on individual artists and invest in the platform instead of human capital.

The gallery system is decentralised and consists of various micro-organisations. The gallerists bear a small fraction to unequal opportunities in artistic careers and are unaware of their small contribution. The market provides no incentives to promote cultural diversity. However, opportunistic entrepreneurs could benefit from this and enter the market to address the overlooked buyers through a conceptual framework centred on culturally diverse narratives.

The limitations of this research are the researchers' interpretation of the interviewees understanding and opinions on cultural diversity through nuanced, implicit, and indirect communication. Moreover, the influence of international trade on cultural diversity is beyond the scope of this research. Future research could investigate the collaborative relationship between gallerists and artists. The increasing availability of artist biographies and artworks online could provide data for qualitative content analysis. Reviewing those biographies would provide deeper insights into how varying artist profiles are marketed and highlight differences between low- middle- and high art market segments or expand on the existing gallery typology.

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## **Appendix A: Interview guide**

### *Introduction*

Thank you for joining me today and participating in this research. Let me first introduce myself. My name is Willemijn van den Berg and I study Cultural Economics & Entrepreneurship at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. I am researching online art platforms and online art selling practices in relation to cultural diversity.

The interview will last about 45 minutes. The questions I will ask you relate to the activities of the gallery, your experiences, and opinion on cultural diversity in contemporary art. There are no right or wrong answers and please feel free to elaborate on what you believe to be interesting or relevant to the topic.

I would like to include the name of the gallery and your name in my final report to increase the reliability of my research. Would you be comfortable with that?

- Yes: Perfect!
- Why: Reliability is an important factor in academic research, because it relates to the ability to reproduce the results under the same conditions. Next to that, the context is helpful to the reader to interpret the results.
- No: Alright, not a problem! Your anonymity is guaranteed, and your name and personal detail will not be mentioned in the final report.

I am going to record the conversation, but this only serves to facilitate the analysis of the information you provide. Do you have any questions or concerns before we start?

### *Take a moment before proceeding*

First, I will ask a few general questions about the gallery and the activities, then we go into the topic of cultural diversity and selling art online. At the end I will also be asking some personal details such as your date of birth and your nationality.

### *Gallery activities*

1. How long have you been in the art business?
2. Which year was the gallery founded?
3. What type of works do you specialise in?
  - 3.1 Which art styles?

- 3.2 What is the price range or the market segment?
- 3.3 Do you target a specific type of collectors? If so, why and how?
- 4. Through which channels are you operating?
  - 4.1 Physical locations? Why? How many locations and where are they located?
  - 4.2 Temporal exhibition spaces? Any art fairs that you usually would attend?
  - 4.2 Online channels? Why? How did you select? Are you satisfied with results?
- 5. What is the mission you want to achieve through [*insert gallery name*]?
  - 5.1 Do you focus on emerging or established artists?
  - 5.2 Does the gallery play a role in building the career of the artists you work with?
- 6. How many artists do you represent?
  - 6.1 Is there a minimum or a maximum that you are representing?
  - 6.2 What are the reasons for limiting the number of artists you represent?
  - 6.3 Would this be different when selling solely online or offline?
- 7. How did you become familiar and get in touch with the artists that you work with?
  - 7.1 Are there artist you represent that you have only met online (and not in real life)?
  - 7.2 Could you sell an artwork online without having seen it in real life first?
- 8. How do you select the artists that you represent?
  - 8.1 What are the criteria for selecting artists that you want to represent?
  - 8.2 Is variety among the artists (or their oeuvre) a criterion?
  - 8.3 Do you believe that it is more difficult for female artists to become established in the art market?

----- [*approx. 10 minutes into the conversation*]

### *Cultural diversity*

- 9. How would you define cultural diversity?
  - 9.1 How are terms such as [inclusivity, equity, social cohesion...] related to diversity?
  - 9.2 Which areas should or could be diversified? Artworks, artists, art schools, policy makers, government, museums, exhibitions, curators, narratives, consumers, buyers?
  - 9.3 Do you believe that the art market is quite diverse or not that much?
- 10. Who should be involved in fostering cultural diversity in the art market?
  - 10.1 Specific organizations, individuals or the government?
  - 10.2 Do you think that art galleries in general play an important role in this?
- 11. Are you concerned with cultural diversity in the contemporary art market?
  - 11.1 Are there any challenges that you face to incorporate diversity?
  - 11.2 Why is it not that simple? Does it require more research, promotions or effort?

- 11.3 Do you believe that selling art online fosters cultural diversity?
12. Do you think your (potential) online buyers are more concerned with diversity?
- 12.1 Would they want or expect to see very different artworks? Or to the contrary?
- 12.2 Have you seen an evolution in the past years? If yes, how? Are they showing some sort of herd behaviour? What would be an explanation for this?
- 12.3 Do you think that education efforts are needed? Can online galleries contribute to this by making it more accessible?
13. Are there any efforts you undertake to foster cultural diversity in your online gallery?
- 13.1 For example a quota or a mindset? Which aspects do you then consider?
- Artist profile: nationality, gender, academic background, country of residence
- Artworks: artistic style, art forms, materials, sizes and colours
- Staffing, exhibitions and online ‘spotlights’
- 13.2 How does this effect the business? Is it less profitable?
- 13.3 Are there any ideas or solutions that are currently not being executed? Why not?
14. Would the reputation of the gallery be affected by representing diversified artists profiles and artworks?

----- [approx. 25 minutes into the conversation]

*Online versus offline*

15. How is selling artworks online different from selling in brick-and-mortar galleries?
- 15.1 Do you believe that through online channels a wider variety of artworks can be displayed? Does that also lead to an increase in sales?
- 15.2 Have you been surprised by an online interest in particular artworks?
16. Does selling art online address a different clientele?
- 16.1 Do you believe that there are different purchasing patterns or motives?
- 16.2 Is there a particular interest for your gallery from a specific region or country?
17. What is your role as a gallerist in the online art market? How is this different?
- 17.1 How do you deal with the increased risk and uncertainty that buyers face when they purchase online?
- 17.2 Are online buyers well informed on the artwork they are interested in?
- 17.3 Are social aspects and networks important? How does the social aspect work within the online space (social media, webinars, live sessions)?
- 17.4 Do buyers often request to see the work first?
- 17.5 Is there a limit to the price that buyers spend on online artwork purchases?
18. Do you alter your activities based on the online traffic to specific artworks or artists?

18.1 Does that also influence the decision-making related to the artists or artworks that you are representing?

19. How does the online presence influence the physical activities?

19.1 Did space and place become less relevant for the operations of the gallery?

19.2 Does the online gallery predominantly functions as an informational portal for collectors or as a marketing tool?

----- [approx. 40 minutes into the conversation]

*Closing questions*

20. Are there things that you would like to mention that have not yet been addressed in this interview?

*Alright, some final questions related to your personal details.*

*Demographic questions*

21. Where do you currently live?

22. What is your date of birth?

23. What is your level of education?

23.1 What did you major in?

24. What is your nationality?

*Closing statement*

I would like to thank you for your time and cooperation in this research. Are you interested in receiving the final report once it is finished mid-July? If you have any further questions or concerns, you can always contact me via my contact details.

----- [approx. 45 minutes into the conversation]



## Appendix B: Third-party platform typology

Table 3 Online art platforms based in the United Kingdom. This table is self-composed based on available data on listed platforms combined with the report by ArtTactic (2020)

Platform	Visual art only	Curated	Founded	Aggregator	Online business type	Artistic style or type	Price segment
ArtFinder	No	No	2010	No	Marketplace	Contemporary	£20 – £50.000
Artful	Missing	Missing	Missing	No	Marketplace	Access restricted	< £5.000
Artnet	Yes	Yes	1989	No	Auction, gallery	Modern and contemporary	£3.000 >
Artplode	Yes	No	2014	No	Marketplace	Various	£500 – £150.000
Artrepublic	Yes	Yes	2014	No	Marketplace	Prints and multiples	< £20.000
Artuner	Yes	Yes	2013	No	Pop-up gallery	Contemporary	Upon request
Artsy	No	Yes	2009	Yes	Marketplace, gallery, auction	Various	£100 – £150.000
Barnebys	No	No	2011	Yes	Auction	Various	Various
DegreeArt	Yes	No	2003	No	Gallery	Contemporary	£15 – £10.000
East End Prints	Yes	Yes	2010	No	Gallery	Prints and cards	£1 – £200
Heritage Auctions	No	No	1976	No	Online auction	Fine art and collectibles	Various
IdeelArt	Yes	Yes	2015	No	Gallery	Contemporary and abstract	£500 – £30.000
Newbloodart	Yes	Yes	2004	No	Gallery	Contemporary	£175 – £10.000
Ocula	Yes	Yes	2010	Yes	Gallery	Modern and contemporary	Upon request
Rise Art	Yes	Yes	2011	No	Gallery, marketplace	Modern and contemporary	£50 – £50.000
The Sale Room	No	No	2001	Yes	Auction, marketplace	Fine art and antiques	Various
Widewalls	Yes	Yes	2017	Yes	Gallery, marketplace	Modern and contemporary	Various

## Appendix C: Coding index

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes
Equity in the art market	Perception of cultural diversity	arts more diverse, arts is elitist, universal language, leftist, liberal, political view, market democratization, injustice
	Dominating male gaze	male buyers, female collectors buying female art, stereotype, gender gap, gender quotas, sexist factors, biological factors
	Cultural monologues or dialogues	competition, specialisation, area of expertise, sharing clients w/ external network, cultural exchange, cultural appropriation, locality, western art dominant, black lives matter
Responsibility and appropriate measures	Affirmative action: including by excluding	gender quotas, female only exhibition, revising history, circularity of diversity, intentions, disingenuous, bottom-up approach, fostering policies, excluding males
	Decentralised responsibility	small impact, top-down approach, agents, micro-business, limited resources, entrepreneurship
	Commercial imperatives: practical and circular	limited resources, few employees, small operation, mix in career stages, emerging artists, established artists, audience diversity, commercial business, puppet of the demand
Bias decision making to overcome uncertainty and risk	Curation based on personal taste (high uncertainty)	finding your niche, novelty, personal taste, gut feeling, intuitive decisions, strategic decisions, third-party platform, data driven decision making, popularity of artworks by females, structured selection process, artwork over profile, ensure quality standards
	Long term collaborative potential (high risk)	personal connections, artist as family, artist as friend, long term relationship, proximity, time zone, price transparency, artist discovery, supply chain, expansion online, limited resources, artist most important, control over supply, exclusivity, joint success



