The Changing Roles of the Artist

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MASTER'S THESIS

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Abstract

My MA Thesis is about the roles an artist can take on in the art scene of today whether it's as an individual artist or as a community artist. In my research I look at how online communities, social media, technological advancements and subjects such as the environmental crisis, changes the artist's role.

My aim with my studies is to create a better understanding of the changes in the art world and how to make active career choices and redefine work methods based on these findings.

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CONTENT

1.Introduction

My hypothesis is that the individual artist might find it more difficult to sustain themselves through art if they can't connect their work to a social media following, or work in communities of different kinds to create visibility and manifest their position. When digitalisation changes the art landscape, artists might also find themselves in roles that are different from the traditional ones. This creates a new frontier of art creation that can be of benefit to the artist, but is at the same time causing an inflation of visual content, making it more difficult to stand out as an artist in today's art market and to find the right tools for marketing and branding.

In this Thesis I research how the artist can adapt to these changes and take on new roles, and by that find alternative ways in the world of art.

Earlier studies that touch this subject from other or similar angles are for example *The curator as a conceptual artist,* Hansson, Joakim (2016), Novia, *How to create a flourishing business: a personal brand and a business model for a visual artist,* (Virtanen, 2019), SAMK and *Building a Career as an Independent Artist in the Digitalised Music Industry,* (Rautiainen (2022), Metropolia, *Personal Branding for Visual Artists* (Rantala, 2021), Aalto University School of Business.

2. Research conducted

2.1 Research methodology

The research I have conducted has been aimed at exploring the changing challenges for artists in the art world of today.

I have used a practice-led research methodology to be able to put myself in new roles as an artist. I have chosen this method to understand it on a deeper, subconscious level. In other words, to live it, not only reflect over it as a *"process of individuation"* (Jung, 1921), and by that change my own role as an artist during the process.

In my research I also conducted interviews and have taken part in online communities to be able to get other perspectives on the subject matter. I have blended those approaches with practical work experiments bridging analogue techniques with digital ones. Again, to put myself in new roles and in new ways of working with art and through that get a different view of the role of the artist.

The reason for this blended approach is to get a plethora of inputs that can serve as comparable examples of roles that the artist can take on.

2.2 Research areas

2.2.1 The role of the artist in social media

In this particular case I've been looking specifically at the artist as an influencer and how the artist can create a career through their following on social media and be a person who can influence others. For this part of the research I have created a stronger social media presence myself and studied different artists' approaches to using social media in today's art world.

I have been studying this because the art world is changing rapidly: those who can take advantage of these new developments can find ways of reaching an audience that they haven't been able to reach in other ways, or because other routes would have been more difficult to take due to

gatekeeping or the lack of formal education.

In this research I have also studied how artists can form communities with the help of social media and how this kind of networking can be used to reinforce identity when working for certain causes and for community work.

2.2.2 The role of the artist in regard to technological advancements.

I have here researched technological shifts as NFTs and AI art and how it affects the artist as an entrepreneur and how the artist needs to take on the role of the curator in these new fields of art. I have created my own collections by taking on the role of curator and further developed this curator role through experiments with AI.

2.2.3 The artist in the age of the eco crisis

Since the awareness of the eco crisis will increase, I have researched how the artist can take on new roles and redefine the artwork in support of certain causes. For this I have developed an image series of tree images and explored pragmatic theories of art.

2.2.4 My role as an artist

What I learned from my findings I have applied to my own role as an artist. I have also created a framework of different work tasks to associate these roles with.

2.3 Collection of data/research material

2.3.1 Artworks

To enable this research, I have created several series of artworks from which excerpts of importance to the study have been selected.

2.3.2 Workshops, exhibitions and art fairs

During the MA program the students, as a group, have attended several art fairs, exhibitions and workshops, among them Patriksfjördur, Iceland, Arles, France, Photo Paris, France and a photobook workshop with Paula Rousch.

2.3.3 Interviews and meetings

Through my studies I have conducted interviews with artists and curators to get a better insight into some of the questions at issue. I have also met with artists and exchanged experiences from the field.

2.3.4 Literature and articles

The books used for this research:

Memories, Dreams, Reflections, Jung, Carl (1921)

Ekologi, samhälle och livsstil (Ecology, society, and lifestyle), Næss, Arne (1981)

Myten om framsteget (The myth about the progress), Henrik von Wright, Georg (2003)

Field of Cultural Production, Bourdieu, Pierre (1993)

Samlade dikter XXVII (Collected poems XXVII), Brenner, Sofia Elisabet (2009)

Several articles have also been used for the research.

2.3.5 Podcasts, videos

Some of the information has been collected from public broadcasts of various kinds.

3. Project development

3.1 The role of the artist in social media

I have looked into how the artist can take on the role of an influencer through social media platforms.

In this role the artist's work is not only to produce art, but also to display the process and inspire those who follow the artist. This creates a bond between the audience and the artist and by nurturing that connection the artist can make themselves an eventual income. It could be direct sales of art via social media accounts, or subscription services such as Patreon where followers get exclusive access to the content that the artist produces, while other services such as Youtube are ad-revenue based.

An example of this is the German artist Valerie Lin, who makes a vlog focused on creating art. She shares her philosophical thoughts about artmaking and how to be able to make art a lifestyle. Just like Valerie, many of these artists who are using social media as their main platform are autodidacts and have learned themselves, often through other social media platforms or are self-taught from their early years.

One of the artists I have talked to is Jenni Pasanen, Finnish NFT artist (Interview 2022, March 28), who mainly uses Instagram and Twitter, as her social media platforms. She explained to me that her goal is to produce a certain number of NFTs and be able to live from making art, although she has no formal education.

In this sense the social media platforms give the artist a shortcut that goes directly to the audience, not via galleries, curators and institutions. You could refer to this artist as the social media artist.

In an interview with Patrick Shanahan on the Artist Business Plans podcast channel he says that from the data he has obtained artists' best possibilities to sustain themselves today are by direct sales to customers, not via galleries.

Furthermore, the ArtNet writes this on Twitter (2021, December 15): "*So while just a few years ago, a talented artist in a remote village could perhaps have their highest aspiration to be the most noted artist in that village...This same artist can now build a global following, and international community around their work. Not by getting a museum show – but by producing great art, and cultivating a community using digital tools, like twitter and discord.*"

3.1.1 Strengthening the social media presence

This insight led me to strengthen my presence at Twitter although I've been a member for ten years. The same with Tiktok, which is now one of the quickest growing social media platforms according to Forbes (Dellatto,M.,2021).

I've done this to create more visibility for my art and music and one of my key findings has been that engagement through sharing art helps you find like minded people who you can support and who support you. The difficulty here is to reach out to a wider audience but, without a smaller engagement from a group to start with, it's very difficult to reach a wider audience in today's social media landscape. It's like rings on the water that slowly spread. I've been testing this approach by keeping direct contact with followers by sharing art, sending DMs and helping share their artwork in return.

Through these actions, you nurture a personal contact with others in the field and can with time make new friends and business partners.

Figure 1

Twitter profile
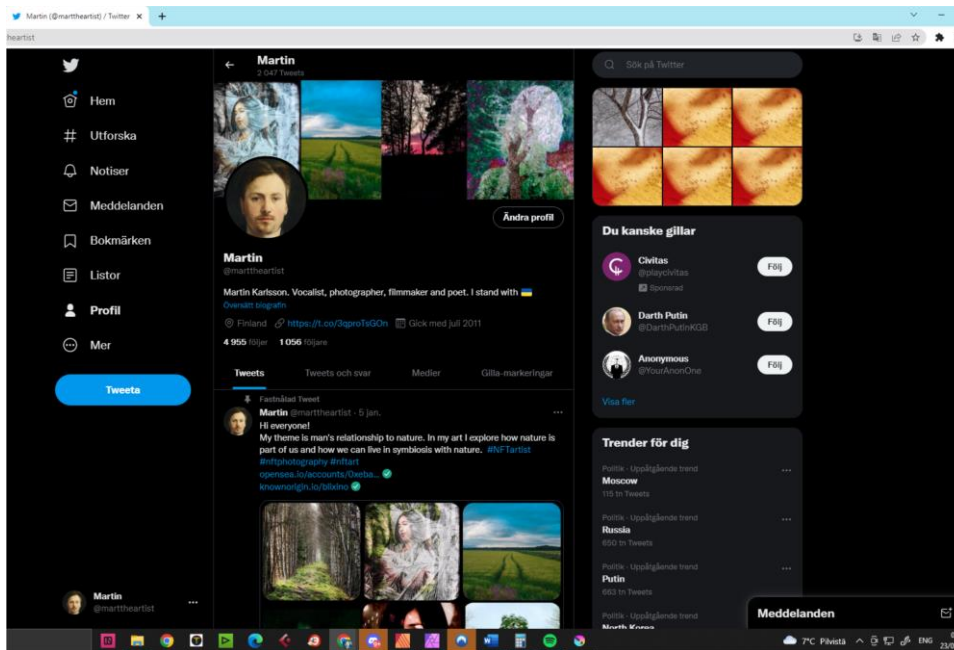
Note. M.Karlsson, 2022, screenshot.

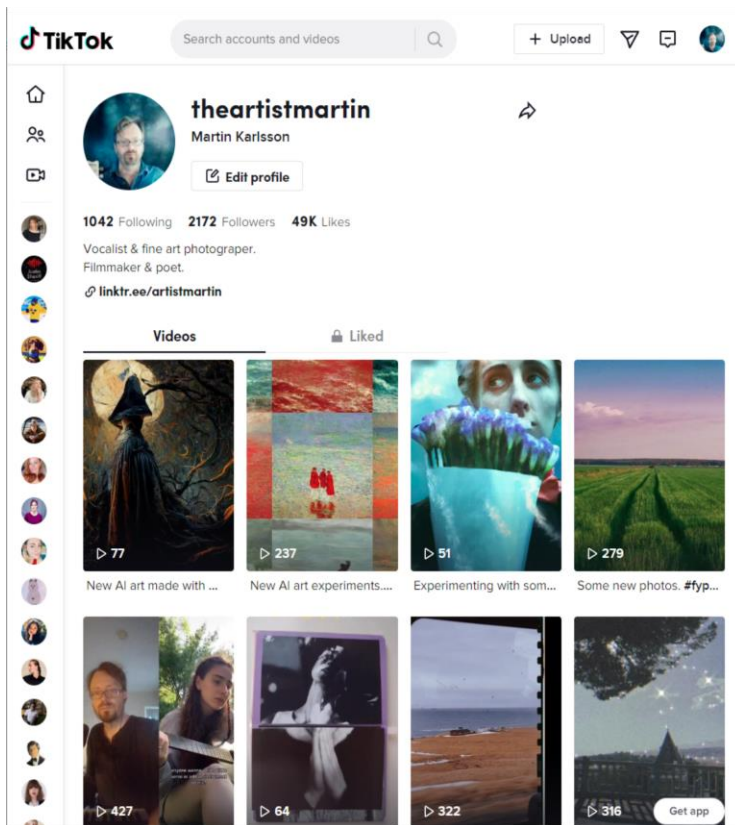**Figure 2**

TikTok profile

Note. M.Karlsson, 2022, screenshot.

3.1.2 The artist in social media as a community worker

As a community worker you also get the ability to use your skills to create platforms for good causes you want to support. It becomes a way for the artist to manifest their identity by taking a stand for things and not only taking on the role of marketing art.

In contrast to how the contemporary art world functions regarding collective work (group exhibitions, artist collectives to mention a few), the social media world offers something different: the ability to build large communities online and set these communities up to achieve certain goals or to create community projects in favor of particular causes. This is one of the strengths with social media and how quickly a message can be sent forward to other recipients.

Therefore it also serves as an opportunity for fund-raising and for finding new audiences and supporters of certain causes.

As an example, Ukraine DAO, has been using art in support of the Ukrainian Army. In cooperation with the Russian artist group Pussy Riot, who turned the Ukrainian flag into an NFT, they have been able to raise over 6 million dollars.

This kind of pragmatic view on art could be adopted to serve many different purposes, even though it's already very common in the world of NFTs at the moment.

3.2 The role of the artist in regard to technological advancements

3.2.1 The world of NFTs

I took a deep dive into the world of NFTs, when it was at its peak. In many ways it's a rebellion and an alternative art world where the artist often ends up in unexpected roles. Something I discovered when creating NFTs was that I often became the curator of things, as in curating one's own collections and curating the art for sale. You can liken it to cards or stamps, it becomes part of your job or hobby to organize everything.

My own experience of creating collections is that an artist is by no means a curator, but an artist who learns to select images over time becomes better at it. It can be seen as an extra role the artist can take on that can help with the overall process of e.g. presenting portfolios or selling art works.

In this self appointed curator role, the artist doesn't move away from creating art, but the emphasis is put on the role of curating art. This makes the artist choose the works based on what series of work that can be sold. It's like a shopkeeper putting the goods on display in the shop. It turns the work order around, instead of putting the creative process in the center of things, the creative process is being tailored to serve the purpose of selling artworks. The risk involved in this is that the artist loses part of their integrity by trying to adapt to the market. The upside is that the artist learns how to present their art for an audience and become better at curating their own art work.

When working myself with NFTs I created several collections from which I choose images to be minted on the blockchain. I put images into groups, e.g. portraits, black and white, landscape, tree images, images made from mixed techniques etc. This was not only to be able to present a series of pictures as NFTs, but also a way of finding the right collection for the right NFT marketplace. On OpenSea, I picked landscape pictures, and on Foundation, another marketplace, I carefully selected what I considered to be my best work since the site has a more exclusive approach.

Figure 3

In the spotlight

Note. By M.Karlsson, 2022, black & white photograph.

Figure 4

Lit

Note. By M.Karlsson, 2022, black & white photograph.

Images above are from my series of black and white images. This series has never been minted as NFTs but the project helped me learn more about creating groups of images for my collection. In this black and white series, all the images are street photos capturing light directions (lines, diagonals etc.)

In a photo workshop with Paula Rousch, we did a similar task, selecting images for photo book projects. In many ways, my discovery is that it has many similarities to the work of creating an NFT collection, in the way the images can be selected based on theme, story or visual components.

Figure 5

NFT collection
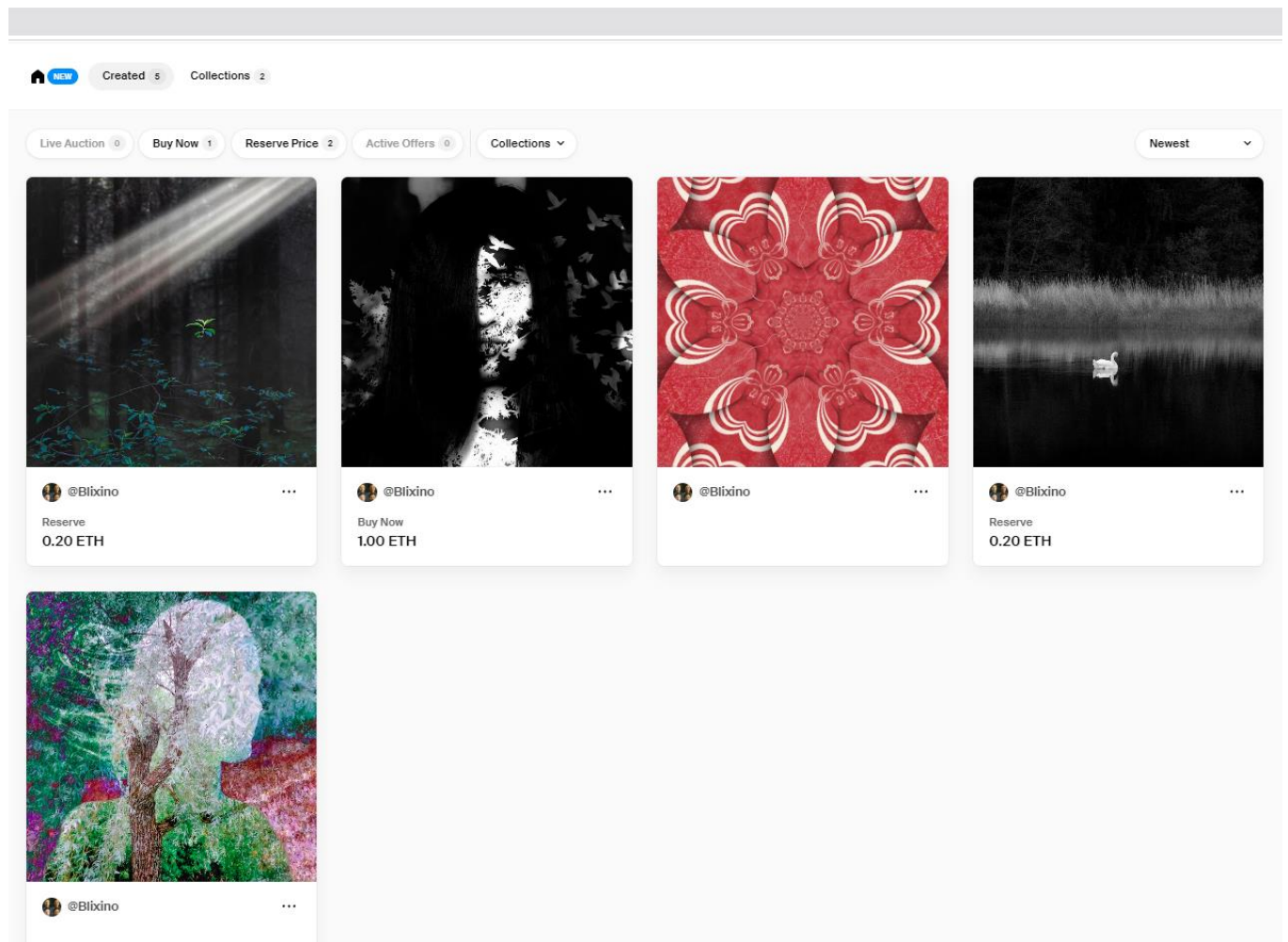
Note. By M.Karlsson, 2022, NFT photographs at the Foundation marketplace.

3.2.2 The collector becoming the curator

In the NFT scene the collector becomes a curator, even more so than the artist who by buying art defines what status and quality the art has in the space. In this role the collector replaces the gallery and the curators.

There are several implications of this, e.g., the collector sets the standard for what is quality or not in the NFT scene. By displaying the collection for others, these being mainly open collections, there is also a standard set for the online gallery and how artworks stand in juxtaposition to each other in the virtual room. The design of these galleries sets new standards for how art can be experienced and what can be considered to be worth buying and collecting. The top spot is held by the 1/1 NFT artworks that have no other editions than the original. In the same way, works that can be purchased through the most exclusive sites are also considered to be of higher financial and artistic value, just as a more prominent gallery. The cryptocurrency attached to the artwork could also be defined as a gold stamp of approval since there is a hierarchy of currencies in the NFT world.

With all this in thoughtful consideration, the crypto art collector builds the collection from the ground up to become a statement of what could be considered quality NFT art in the space.

3.3 The AI Revolution

In the world of AI art, the artist again takes on the role of the curator but in a much more direct way. The artist becomes a creative curator who instructs the machine to create and then picks the best output and collects those outputs in various collections. The artist can then instruct the machine to make changes, edit and output new variants. Since it's a random process you might not always get the answer you like, but you always get to choose what you keep, which makes you both a collector and a curator of your own AI art.

In my studies I have conducted several experiments with AI art using different AI software, such as Dall-E2, Midjourney, Stable diffusion, to see if this could change my perception of myself as an artist.

As many who have explored the possibilities of AI, I was surprised about the quality of the artwork as well as its artificial originality. Every piece is unique (not to be replicated again) and therefore could be taken for artwork made by a human being. Several of the pieces I made were AI generated images on the themes that already exist in my images, or techniques I already use, for example film photography techniques.

By relieving myself from the role of the traditional artist, I could instead take on the role of a creative curator. In my research I discovered that deliberate choices would make the artwork feel more like my own artwork, for example choice of color, text-input, mise-en-scene, characters, costumes and themes from my own imagery.

I find the role of the curator different when it comes to AI art from the curator role in NFT art, since AI generates the art and the artist is making choices from what is presented. It can be compared with a wall sending the ball back when you play tennis. Everytime it comes back in different places and you adjust every hit to receive a better outcome.

The four images on the next page serve as examples of this. They were created with the AI software Midjourney which is a text based AI program. You write what you would like the image to look like with specific words. In this case:

portrait, woman, reflection, closed eyes, whole face, shirt, 1780, rain, sad, lonely, evening light, damaged negative, photography, ilford, hp5, adox, kodak tri-x, 35mm photograph, film photograph, vintage, black and white, grain, medium format photographic rendering, lumion rendering

Figure 6

Example 1

Note. By Midjourney, 2022, AI generated images.

As you can see some features are more pronounced than others, e.g. the damaged negative look and the vintage look that has been determined by the year chosen. In 1780 there was no photography technique of this kind, but since the association is free with this technique the machine has decided to guess that it might have looked something like this.

In the next iteration, this is what the program made.

Figure 7

Example 2

Note. By Midjourney, 2022, AI generated images.

I now had four examples to choose from and by putting myself in the curators role I decided to choose the one closest to my personal style. It's not far from the photographer's role of picking the best take, but there's a difference. It wasn't a take and I did not take this image.

Figure 8

Example 3

Note. By Midjourney, 2022, AI generated image.

Here's another implication. The camera as a physical tool has a lens, a sensor, a film type. All that together with the photographer's vision makes the output of the camera unique depending on the choices made. However, AI can simulate all this if you ask it to create an image from, for example, a medium format camera, a certain film type and add to that what aperture and lens you are using.

Figure 9

Example 4
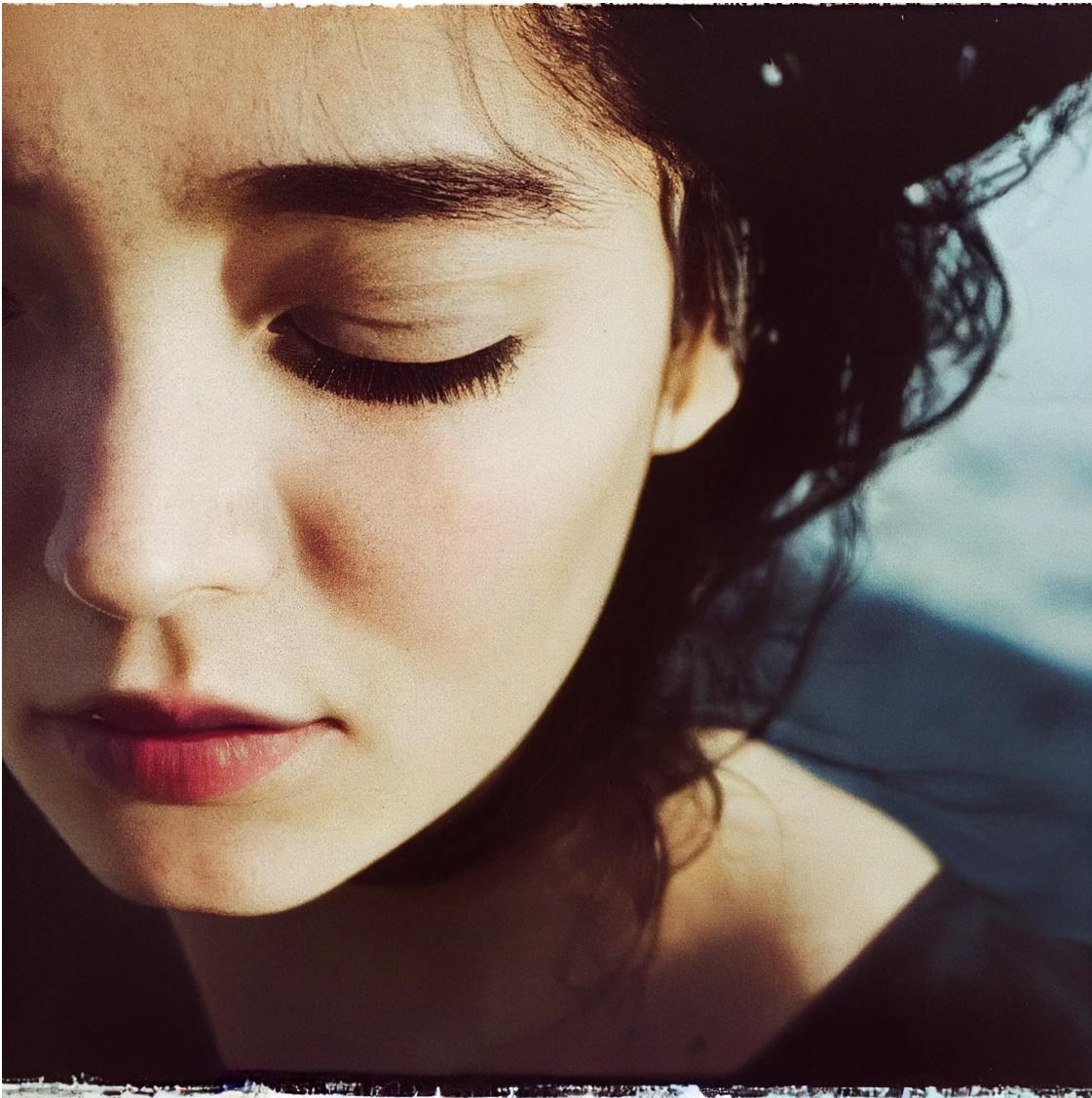
Note. By Midjourney, 2022, AI generated image.

The film types in this example are Technicolor, Kodak Portra and Ektachrome which are completely different films for motion picture respective photography. Except for this, the image prompt (text based description) was very similar to the one used for the black and white pictures in example images 1,2 and 3 (p. 19, 20, 21).

Since AI can simulate photography film relatively well, it made me interested in knowing if it can simulate other historical formats, glass negatives or older film types. And it does a pretty good job in this portrait of a young man in the 1800s.

Figure 10

Example 5

Note. By Midjourney, 2022, AI generated image.

These are iterations of landscape photography using prompts for older black and white film and early color film.

Figure 11

Example 6

Note. By Midjourney, 2022, AI generated image.

Figure 12

Example 7

Note. By Midjourney, 2022, AI generated image.

It can also simulate mishaps and imperfections that makes film a unique experience. In this example it has missed the focus point and focused on the hair. A common mistake with medium format rangefinders for example:

Figure 13

Example 8

Note. By Midjourney, 2022, AI generated image.

It's clear that art can be created by the machine itself, and this insight will change the relationship to the work. As one of my interviewees, Jenni Pasanen, said when she explained how she creates art:

"I paint with a machine"
(Pasanen, 2022)

For example, in the autumn of 2022 I did my first commissioned work for Pianorama in Denmark, using an image from AI. The conclusion drawn from that experience is that automatisation makes for a quicker workflow and consumes less time on designing (in this case), and that the output of the content communicated is vastly different from what you would have done with traditional techniques.

Figure 14

Example 9

Note. By Midjourney, 2022, AI generated image.

Lastly, in this section, my absolute favorite picture of them all. I wonder what he's thinking. It's a captured moment in time.

But then again it isn't. And this person does not exist.

3.4 New dimensions

Another finding is that technological advances open up opportunities for a new kind of cross disciplinary work where new techniques can be blended with traditional and contemporary artwork. An example of this is some of the NFT art made at the House of Lobkowicz in Prague, Czech Republic.

To know more about the artwork I spoke to Dita Baker (Interview 2021, October 25), Director of Administration and Educational Programming at House of Lobkowicz. We talked about contemporary art and she said it has become repetitive and copies what others have already made. She thought the NFTs they made at Lobkowicz added other dimensions to the art even if it was, in this case, created in a short time.

This is also my own experience from visiting the exhibition *New Perspectives Through Photography – 25 years by the Helsinki School*, that there's a considerable difference between the postindustrial art in, for example, photography, that the Helsinki School has produced and the postmodern art of today. In the latter you can use technological advancements to add new layers to artworks using new editing techniques, AI and coding. This has simply not been possible before because of the industrial hardware we have used earlier in our craft.

An example of this is the art piece *"Forgotten Menuet" (2021)*, by the House of Lobkowicz. In the artwork music notes come to life in a graphic video, but the music piece itself is from 18th century, by the female composer Comtesse Anna Maria Wilhlemina von Althann (although her creative role is currently being studied). It definitely adds new dimensions and makes something otherwise forgotten come alive. It also serves another purpose, and that is to highlight female composers in music and to present history in new ways by bridging old techniques with new.

This postmodern approach alters the role of the artist by making the artist someone who can work across borders and, although nothing new, connecting the old with the latest technique makes for a sort of time travel through art history which also can be seen both in NFT artworks and in AI art. This stands in contrast to the art eras before us where certain isms dominated - now it's more all of them at once or some of them according to one's choice. AI takes this a step further by generating this transition automatically since it uses data from all of art history.

For the artist, it might mean a shift in roles, from working in a defined space in a specific time, to now being able to take anything from history or the present, and mix it into new mashups. I like to call these artists 'art DJs', but instead of lining up a beat with a melody, the art DJ is mixing all kinds of elements, manmade, machine-made into new remixes of art. Perhaps not a creative curator, but a creative producer instead.

In my studies I have conducted an experiment with this approach. I mixed painting techniques with computational photography apps using my own photographs and in one experiment even using woodcut technique.

Figure 15

Landfall

Note. By M.Karlsson, 2022, photograph. Computational photography and drawing.

In the image and album cover "*Landfall*", I created a "matrix" (reference to the movie with the same name) to make the land fall downwards. The mountain chain is drawn and the field is an Ostrobothnian field photographed as a panorama on an old Canon 5D and stitched together in the computer.

The music on the album has a sound of the piano keys "falling downwards" when played.

Figure 16

Yellow Field

Note. By M.Karlsson, 2022, photograph.

The original photograph as reference.

Figure 17

Digital Flower
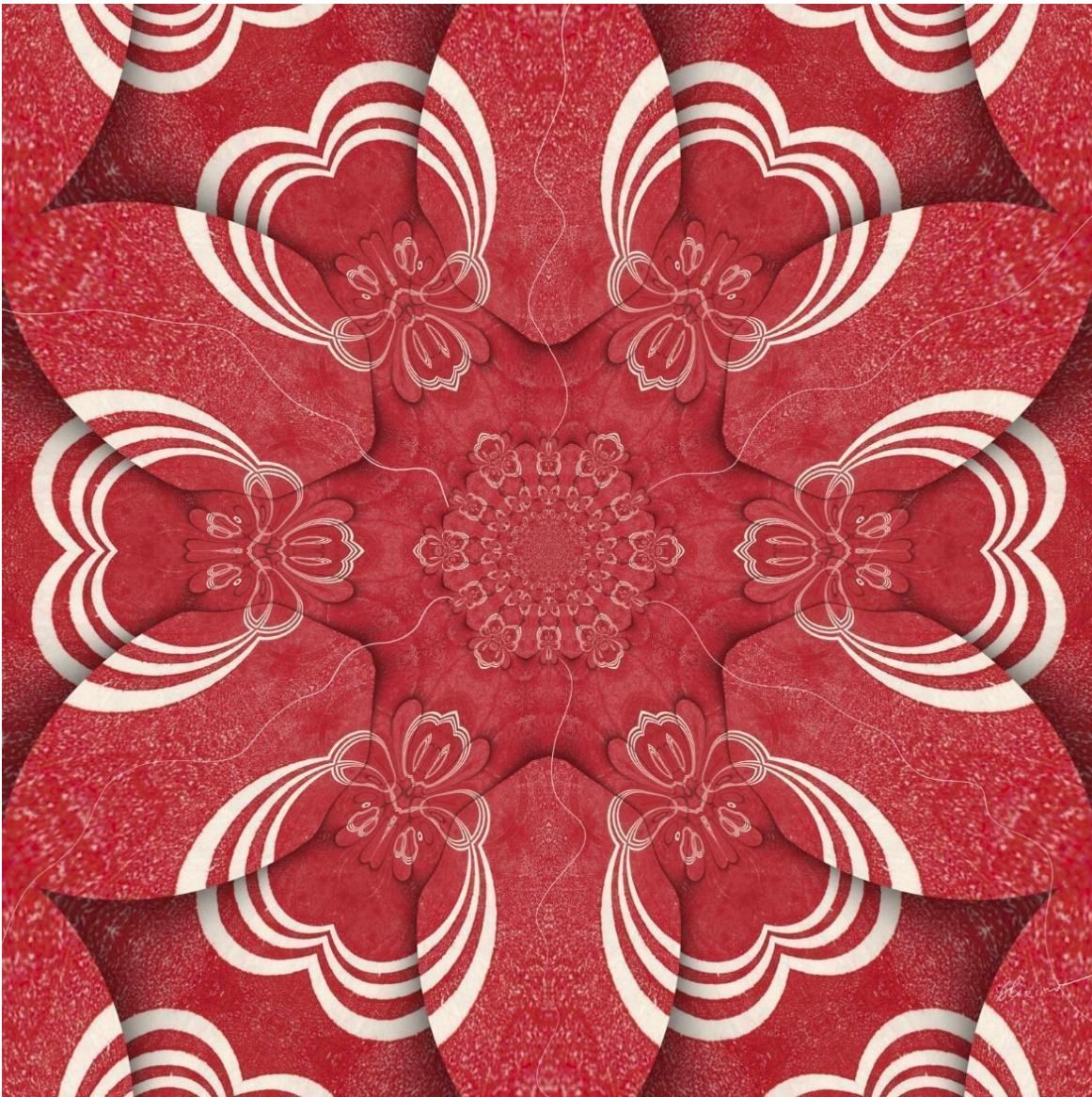
Note. By M.Karlsson, 2022, photograph. Woodcut technique, computational photography and drawing.

In this image I used a scan of an original print made from woodcut technique. I have made a computer generated reshape of the image and, in addition to that, some parts have been hand-drawn. The image has then been minted as an NFT on the Ethereum blockchain (2022).

The statement for this picture is:

"A digital flower can never go extinct. But real flowers can."

(Karlsson, 2022)

3.5 The artist role in the age of the eco crisis

Already in the 1970s environmental philosophers like Arne Naess and Henrik von Wright tried to inform the world about the eco crisis and how we have to change our relationship to nature to be able to preserve it. Well known American scientist Carl Sagan informed the US Congress on the matter of global warming in a video (*Carl Sagan testified before Congress in 1985 on climate change*, 1985). He tried to make politicians understand what impact it might have on the future state of the world. However, years have gone by and change has taken place gradually, but time seems to have run out and our relationship to nature has changed, but perhaps not in the way the environmental philosophers were hoping.

With this in mind, I assume it will be difficult for any artist to avoid this subject in the coming years, since the eco crisis probably will become a subject of everyday life.

In some regards it might be that art is used for the purpose of eco activism, e.g. the performance art by groups like Extinction Rebellion, and in some cases it might affect the artist's job regarding eco-friendly solutions in the process of making art and exhibiting art.

Going back to the thinking of the environmental philosophers and our relationship to nature, I have created a body of work, which consists of images of trees, which I hope can make people reevaluate their relationship to nature and by that their willingness to care about nature.

The images have been chosen from a collection of negative film, mostly 35mm, but also digital photographs. The image group consists of images of trees that all are depicted as living souls. The reason behind this is to make it possible for the audience to connect on a personal level.

Negatives are scanned with modified older camera equipment to create an organic look somewhere between painting art and photography art. The reason for this choice is to make the trees look more like creatures, a quality I think that the extra texture can bring out.

Figure 18

Tree picture 1

Note. By M.Karlsson, 2021, black & white photograph, 35mm.

Figure 19

Tree picture 2

Note. By M.Karlsson, 2022, black & white photograph, 35mm.

Figure 20

Tree picture 3

Note. By M.Karlsson, 2020, photograph.

Figure 21

Tree picture 4

Note. By M.Karlsson, 2020, photograph.

I have then created one collage as a cross border experiment between the boundaries of man and nature. It's a somewhat different take and I want to research the difference between this idea and how people can relate to nature depending on what the artwork communicates.

The collage is made of film and digital photography side by side with AI and I have chosen this approach to create a mix of techniques that can create a relationship between man and tree, man and nature. The photos were taken in Ostrobothnia, Finland, Arles, France and in Sicily, Italy. AI images were created with the AI neural network Midjourney.

Figure 22

Evergreen

Note. By M.Karlsson, 2020, photograph, collage, AI.

3.5.1 Redefining the artwork

The complete series of photographs serves the purpose of redefining the artwork. An artwork that can be used to make us look at nature with new eyes, as the environmental philosophers suggested in their writing, and be part of a chain leading up to real life implementations. In this case, planting trees, restoring habitats. It could even inspire the collector to take similar initiatives or be part of getting the message across.

This way of using art for a certain purpose could be aligned with a pragmatic theory of art, in which art is a means to an end, not only art for art's sake or art as expression. I think this view allows not only for using art in a certain way, but is open for ways to develop the content of the art work to create a stronger response from the audience supporting the cause.

In the "discussion and conclusion" (p.43), there is more on this topic, and how it can be implemented by the artist of today.

3.6 My role as an artist

My research has led me to change my own role as an artist. I have come to realize that an artist of today has to take on several roles and that these roles should be in support of each other.

To be able to define these roles, I have set up an art business, a kind of store, as a framework for my activity. In this art business, there are three areas divided into work tasks: branding and communication, production, distribution and finance.

How these roles are interconnected is up to the artist to manage, but it could help to lay out a plan for what roles are needed and what purpose each one of them serves.

The reason I chose this model is because I would like to find a sustainable way forward for myself as an artist, one in which I can sustain myself via my art and at the same time transform my view on the different work tasks, and by that, take on new roles as an artist.

3.6.1 Branding and communication

For the artist of today, branding is key. A brand can be created through the art you make, through the galleries that represent you and through your identity as an artist.

Following David Aaker's brand identity structure (Aaker, 1991), an artist would need to create this identity through a combination of *"brand awareness, brand loyalty and brand associations"* (Wikipedia, 2022).

In my work, I have given this some thought and come to the realization that I would like to work with my old theme of man's relationship to nature, but become a more active part in it, leaning over to take on the role of activism and form my own community around these activities. To help support these causes I had the opportunity to speak to several like minded artists at the workshop at Les Rencontres d'Arles, France, (Meeting 2022, July 3-9), who I have invited to this community based project. The project bears the same name as my image "*Evergreen"* (p. 34), and it's intended not only to be a project for a good environmental cause, but also serve as part of my brand as an

artist. I hope to inspire others to follow and take initiatives to start similar projects.

On Evergreen: it's a community based project with artists working together for a common cause, in this case reforestation and plant growing projects. The members can contribute by selling art, networking in their local communities and inspire others to take similar initiatives.

3.6.2 Production

Taking a leap from the personal brand into my own production as an individual artist, I thought it would be of benefit to my work to combine all the art forms I work with, into one body of work. It would be easier to communicate the brand identity and would also save me time and make my distribution easier.

To be able to achieve this I use the knowledge obtained from my role of curating NFTs and AI art. This process introduced me to how different elements in the work can be combined into one body of work. I have then created a concept exhibition that includes music performance, photos, video and poetry.

My first pilot project is a visual poetry book. The pages of the book are all artworks displayed in a round circle in the exhibition room and you can choose to start reading from any place in the circle. It makes it possible for the viewer to create their own story, since the story will shift depending where you start to read/watch. The intention behind this is to transcend my own experience of poetry reading, since I think the greatness of it is that you can start anywhere and stop anywhere, giving the viewer different story lines depending on the starting point. I want the visitor to feel like they walk into the book itself.

The poetry book is written as a diary in a future world. The idea is to play with the viewer's fantasy to imagine what the future could be like. The book project itself is a commentary on the environmental crisis. The exhibition consists of 15-20 digital "book pages" combining poetry, image, text and video.

Figure 23

Visual poetry book

Note. By M.Karlsson, 2022, cross disciplinary artwork, photography, AI, text-based art, video, music (in the exhibition space).

As an additional program I play a concert on the opening night and again on the ending of the exhibition. I would like to bring live music into the space to take the viewer through the experience step by step, or rather song by song. The music program is carefully selected and has a dramaturgy. When I'm not playing by myself, the music is played from a disk in the room.

In this development of creating "one body of work", I have also done several video experiments that could be seen as the artistic embryo from which the visual concept was born. These videos are cross-disciplinary work combining music, video and photography, but in this case leaving text based poetry out. The videos are titled *"Soul of a River"* and *"Tears from Above"*, both based on my piano compositions with the same titles.

Figure 24

Soul of a River

Note. By M.Karlsson, 2021, still frame from video, cross disciplinary artwork, photography, video, music.

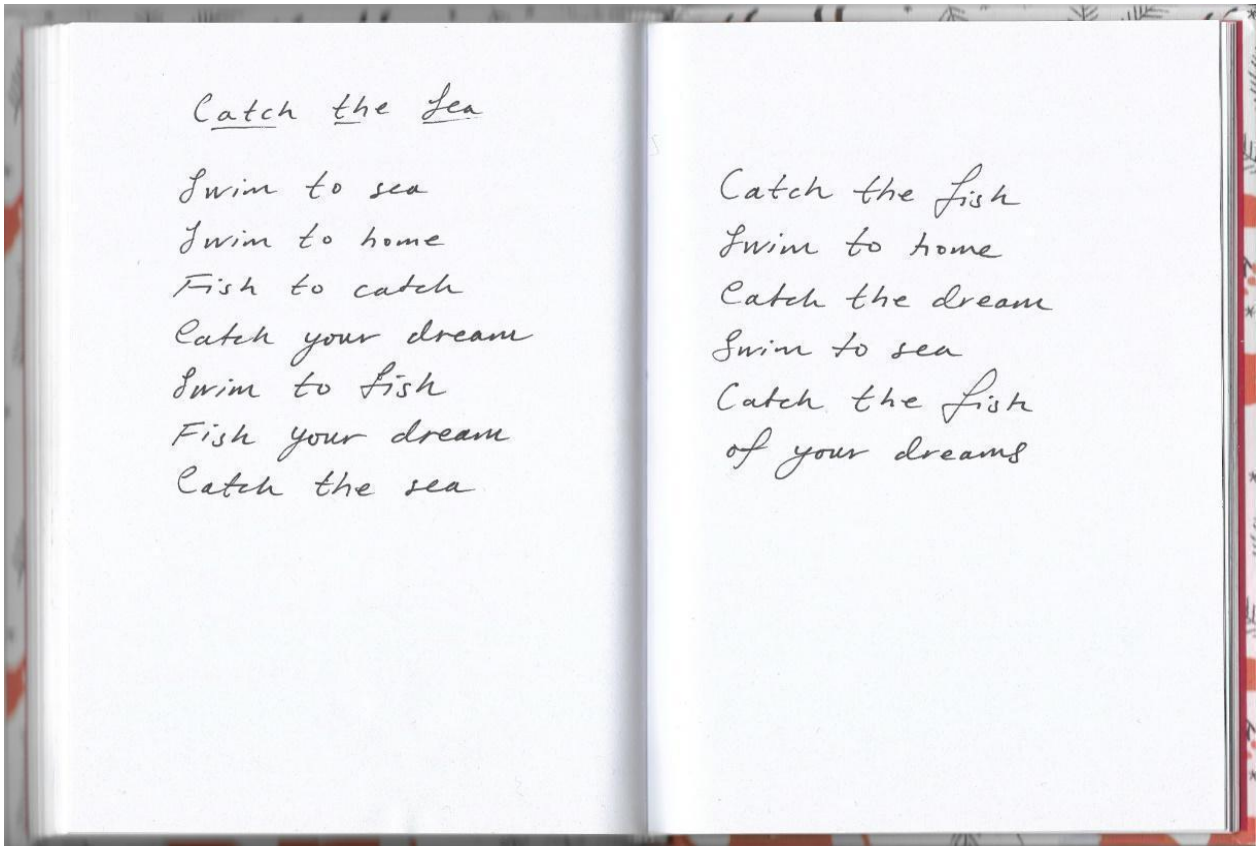**Figure 25**

Tears from Above

Note. By M.Karlsson, 2021, still frame from video, cross disciplinary artwork, photography, video, music.

Before this I worked with text-based poetry separately, as in this example:

Figure 26

Catch the Sea

3.6.3 Distribution and finance

To be able to distribute my new work, I would take on the role of the social media artist (not as an influencer), but instead use social media as a form of opportunity for artist talks, live performance of artworks and a way to gather a new audience that would like to follow my work and who can identify themselves with a similar identity and thinking.

After comparing many different social media outlets in my research, I decided to create a live broadcast with live art performances, that I curate myself being the creative producer .

I also choose this broadcast model since it's quite environment-friendly and a way of working outside the traditional venues and instead more directly to a new audience, who have perhaps not experienced content of this particular kind before. It could therefore work as a scene within the scene.

By creating this channel I would also further develop my brand identity model, such as "*extended elements*" (Aaker, 1971), where the interaction with the audience plays a great part, and serves as part of the brand.

Attached to the live channel, there is also a small art store where you can buy and support environmental projects by buying art prints, merchandise, books or by directly supporting selected causes. All these products are made with reused paper and eco-certified ink.

I have researched how these products can be produced in an environment-friendly way and through my study I have found a service that can help me with everything from production to shipping with zero carbon emissions.

Lastly, my logo. The purple color and the shape of the logo resembles the color of the Ångermanlandian landscape flower (my birthplace).

Figure 27

Viola, logo for artist Martin Karlsson

Note. By Midjourney, 2022, AI generated logo.

4. Discussion and conclusion

A 21th Century artist is a person who has to be able to shoulder the challenges of using the communication tools of the modern era. A person who has to be able to reach out in a world where we mainly live in two spaces, in real life and online. It's not only using the new platforms that can be an essential part of the artist's work, it's also the way we use social media today, creating communities on a much larger scale that can be formed in groups or art collectives in real life.

With the online world as a domain, the artist can reach quicker and further out to individuals and groups, changing not only the connection to the audience, but even to the artwork itself in recreating how work is made, displayed and consumed.

While changes towards a more community-based approach might occur in the artworld, there are many challenges for the individual artist, since the online world of art, via internet and social media, holds a never ending supply of artwork causing an inflated market of images, video, sounds, text-based art etc., where new contributions as well as AI further fill the well of art to the brim. Due to the simple rules of supply and demand, the professional artist's livelihood might be at risk in a longer perspective when prices are lowered due to inevitable inflation in the digital market. This might force the artist to find new niches or create new art scenes, so called *"scenes within the scene"* (p.41), since the old systems might not work in the artist's favor anymore.

One could argue that art holds a great value as such, but the everchanging challenge of surviving as an artist might steadily keep getting more and more difficult no matter how highly art is regarded, if the very foundation of the art world erodes. According to Pierre Bourdieu, writer of the book *"Field of Cultural Production"*, the artist looks towards the art field for acknowledgement. This makes the artist dependent on the institutions, such as galleries and museums, to receive the status that in return classifies their art to a higher financial value. However, for this to work out in favor of the artist, the institutional art world has to be constant, securing the pillars of its temples and upholding the existing art scene and at the same time ensure there is a way for the new artist to enter this temple. The basis for this is government and private funding and a will to keep the physical galleries alive. Only the future will tell if this approach will stand the test of time and if Bourdieu's *"field of restricted production" (*Bourdieu, 1991), would still be a sustainable way forward for the artist.

One could also make the argument that art holds its value over time (as a financial investment), but it doesn't necessarily make room for the new artist to have a place at the table, and isn't equivalent to art being of value in the future market, since it depends on how people view visual content and how they use it in their everyday life, or see it as something to invest in. Behaviors shift and so does the context in which art is created. If we live in a society bombarded by visuals, there's a risk that we don't consider images to be rare anymore. One could imagine when the early Christian congregations came to the church for the first time, how impressive the wall paintings must have been. In a similar way a gallery can be seen as a place in which "alterpieces" are displayed. The never-seen-before will always tickle the human mind. But what is everywhere is easily passed by.

In the 1600s, for example, fine poetry was of great importance to the noble classes. Occasional poems were written for church ceremonies and the poets who were prominent in the field and could make good careers from it. However when poetry was mainly published in books, the importance of the declamation of the poem decreased. And since books became mass produced items, poetry became a restricted market inside a mass market.

Since poetry and art are crafts, there is a potential risk that hand made art by humans is only preserved as something the really rich, the noble classes, can pay for, just like you would pay for occasional poetry, real sculptures or for a carpenter making replicas of 1800s ornaments of wood in e.g., a mansion.

Now, one could draw the conclusion that while there would be a lesser need for artists (as paid workforce), there might instead be a greater need for curators due to the high inflation of visual content in the digital realm. But an argument against this is that automation processes often lead to the need for fewer people, just keeping those busy who oversee the work. The artisan might not have a place at the table anymore. Also keep in mind that most work in creative industries is some kind of technical work, but as it can be replaced by new technology, this will make the role of the artist change as well.

As a person with experience in the music industry, I have done a similar journey before. When digital music became a thing, the price for CDs went up. Then came illegal downloading followed

by streaming services. As the music industry took these steps, the market ended up, in this day and age, being overwhelmed with tracks, leading to decreased payments and royalties for musicians. Because of this musicians instead put their hopes towards the live stage and live events bringing back money that was lost in production, while the music producers increased their importance. Today, music is to be considered a marketing tool, a means to an end. If this parallel can be used for fine art, artists need to find their income from other places than selling art, which in many cases already is the situation for many. This would mean exhibiting and displaying artworks would become marketing and the artist must find a way to perform to make up for the losses in the production sector.

An argument against this comparison with the music industry, is that art is *"restricted production"* (Bourdieu, 1991), and it can not be compared to the mass or popular culture that music has become. On the other hand, music hasn't always been in the hands of many, due to the class society, with limited production means and limited ways of distribution, especially before the industrial revolution took place. In the digital era, the production is further increased and amplified by technological advancements to reach the hands of everyone. The question would then be: how to preserve restricted production, and make art keep its value.

The issue is also to ask if there is not a third way of production, instead of restricted production and mass production, as an alternative for the artist of today. This third way is built around a pragmatic view of art (what art can be used for) and exists outside the gallery world. This goes back to my thoughts about redefining the artwork (p.35), and how this can be used for a certain purpose. If the artist chooses this approach, the art can serve as a communicator between artist and audience. Engagement in the matter at hand follows naturally with causes like this. Before social media arrived it would have been difficult to build these kinds of bridges between art, communication and purpose in a financially sustainable way.

The artist that chooses to work in this realm of pragmatic art, invites others not for the sake of the art, but for the sake of the purpose. For this approach, there is no need for galleries, instead communication is not coming from one or multiple messengers, but is an interaction, an ongoing conversation over time, where the artist sets up a communication hub for all the interested parties to take part in. One of the benefits of this approach is a possible increase in democratic movement and involvement and it could serve as an example of how to increase people's engagement. In

some cases, it could replace political movements and leave room for a more direct stance on democracy, by addressing issues of concern, such as an alternative to representative democracy.

This third way of working as an artist alters the artist's role in several ways. One is the community artist, the person who communicates to others about identity and purpose and inspires others to action. In this role, social media is key. Social media also makes it possible for the artist to take on roles as inspirer and educator, or have art as a lifestyle influencing others.

Today's technological developments in digital art, such as NFT and AI, give the artist further possibilities to change their role, e.g. becoming a creative curator and creative producer, curating and collecting, and presenting and displaying art in new ways on digital platforms or in real life.

It would be of importance for artists to take roles like these into consideration and prepare for possible changes of strategy and expansion of tasks associated with the profession.

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