



## Possible Use Case of the Multidisciplinary Approach of Art Collaboration

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Recognizing that much of art collaboration projects undertaken by businesses today consume art for simple marketing purposes only and that even academic research on art collaboration is lopsidedly focused on the marketing function thereof, this study explores prospects for long-term collaboration between fine art and businesses. Contrasting the majority of one-time marketing events that have been organized in the form of art collaboration by innumerable businesses so far, the partnership between Unilever and Tate Modern, on the one hand, and Hyundai Motor's culture and art projects, on the other, are distinct for their long-term commitment to culture and the arts. These two cases have opened up new possibilities for not only artists, but also businesses and consumers. Taking inspiration from Rosalind Krauss' emphasis on "reinventing the medium" as the "post-medium condition" defining contemporary art, this study explores the importance of aesthetic value to long-term collaboration between fine art and commerce, and examines the broader horizon of opportunities that such collaboration opens up for both sides.

**Keywords:** Art collaboration Art marketing, Contemporary art, Culture and art projects

### Introduction

The concept of "contemporaneity", inference to works with strong visual art elements worldwide, emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> In particular, contemporary art has defied attempts of interpretation from a single perspective; it encourages the convergence of social discourses and new technologies given its inherently interdisciplinary nature. While modern art has been extensively analyzed and discussed, the same cannot be said for its counterpart.

How, then, may we define the concept of fine art within contemporary art? Painting has been regarded as a conventional medium of artistic expression since the 1960s. The advancement of technology gravely threatened painting and its representation. Accordingly, painting evolved into non-representative abstractionism on the basis of a purist strain of modernism to the style of Clement Greenburg. The post-modernist theorist Rosalind Krauss then began to tout the need to "reinvent the medium"<sup>2</sup> in the "post-medium" conditions, drawing upon Walter Benjamin's philosophy of history to forecast the direction of fine art. Through her work, Krauss explored the potentials of the old mediums for capturing contemporary messages.

"Reinventing the medium" opens up a space in which artists can conceptualize messages independently of the medium's characteristics. In addition to the emergence of this "post-medium" in the world of fine art, collaboration has come to gain to broader meaning beyond joint works among artists. Art collaboration today is understood to implicate industries. Pop art, which began blurring the boundary between fine art and commercial art, has also awakened businesses to the marketing potential of art. As art collaboration has its origin in marketing, its performance depends exclusively on the financial and economic development in businesses and industries.

Much of the existing literature on art collaboration is able to communicate this fact. Existing studies tend to highlight the marketing aspects of collaboration in art, treating fine art as playing a role simply in packaging design.<sup>3</sup> The marketing-centered analysis, however, has compromised the sustainability of art collaboration. Given the rapid pace at which changes occur in the contemporary business environment, most art collaboration projects tend to be one-time events. Because few businesses have embraced fine art—art for art's sake—in art collaboration, despite its potential to broaden the horizon for art collaboration, few researchers have focused on it.<sup>4</sup>

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Now that art collaboration is expanding its sphere of influence, it is time for us to explore the long-term contributions that fine art can make to businesses.

## Theoretical Considerations

### Art Collaboration: History and Significance

Collaboration, derived from the Latin word *collaboration* that combines *cum* (“together”) with *laboro* (“work”), refers to the cooperation of individuals and groups toward a specific goal. Art collaboration in the past mostly meant collaboration between artists. However, the inclusion of “art” has somehow come to denote that it is something more and that it involves cooperation between artists and businesses or industries. The march of modernity amid the industrial revolution and the rise of machinery have given birth to the so-called “mediums,” threatening the position and prestige that had traditionally been wielded by fine art. Engineers found themselves more and more involved in the production of artistic works, while artists increasingly found themselves lost amid mass production and the division of labor. The diversification of mediums nonetheless also gave artists opportunities to broaden their imagination. The emergence of a new horizon of thinking, now referred to as post-modernism, has furthered art collaboration in the contemporary sense.

The evolution of mediums has transformed the concept of the artist. The artist is now a thinker, a researcher, and an inventor who provides ideas and collaborates with engineers in a project to develop a product.

The contemporaneity of art collaboration is most evident in the mass media. The advancement of computer technology has given rise to trans-disciplinary discourses. Artists and engineers have been diversifying their understanding and expressions in new forms, significantly multiplying the points of contact between art and technology.<sup>5</sup> The advancement and division of new fields has enabled industrial-artistic collaboration projects to transcend the analog and head into the digital.

The elevation of the public profiles of artists and their works, thanks to collaboration, has multiplied opportunities for artists to continue their creative activities. The images of their artistic products, made and distributed through collaboration, are now a familiar sight to the public and engender diverse new applications. The growth of art distribution, matching the spirit of the era, further induces new forms of

collaboration between businesses and artists as well as between art and industries to generate more revenue. Art collaboration is no longer about just design supporting industrial growth. The significance and functions of art collaboration have expanded to the extent that we may now expect collaboration projects that can also be considered fine art. The convergence of heterogeneous elements leads to a new creation that is both unique and interesting.

### Conventional Art Collaboration and Limits

There are different types of art collaboration practiced in the contemporary era. The first is the artist-brand collaboration, which is expected to increase the rarity and value of the brand. The second involves brand-to-brand collaboration, with one brand borrowing elements from another to give itself a new value. The third and final type is character-brand collaboration, which involves combining well-known characteristics of a character with a product to reinforce the latter’s identity and boost its marketing.<sup>6</sup> These are the three typical forms of art collaboration, which businesses employ to strengthen their brand images and increase profit in the long run.

All these common forms of art collaboration, however, are short-lived and do not extend to a long-term collaboration. The human and financial resources invested in art collaboration projects have been treated as sunken costs, like the expenses of organizing brand-launching events. Art collaboration appeals to the need for discrimination, which numerous researchers have identified as a core element of marketing.<sup>7</sup> The need to discriminate may not present a strong risk to short-term profits, but it requires continued and relentless production of new images in the long run. Businesses who commission art collaboration therefore prefer limiting such projects to one-time events to ensure the novelty of these images.

Design modeling heavy on visual motifs is popular among consumers at large, while modeling based on the unique stories of artistic works has a weaker appeal. For these reasons, most products of art collaboration are mere visual appropriations of existing and well-known images intended to increase sales.

### Fine Art in Art Collaboration

The Unilever Series, which was on display in the Turbine Hall for 13 years from 2000, was the product of the famous collaboration between the company and Tate Modern. Unilever supported the entire process of

creating space-specific installations in the Turbine Hall. The project benefitted both the museum and the company. It was, in fact, so popular that it lasted for 13 years, beyond the initial five-year timeline.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, Unilever supported art education through its International School Art Project, with the stated purpose of improving children's lives through art. The program featured an international youth workshop entitled "The Unilever Series: Turbine Generation" as well as the Unilever Series Online Education Project.

Unilever used these art collaboration projects toward realizing its vision of helping inspiring people. Consequently, the company succeeded in strengthening its brand, raising its value by 150 percent more than what it spent on the projects.

For over a decade, Hyundai Motor is another company renowned for its commitment to culture. Through its long-term partnership with the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA) in Korea and global partnerships with the Los Angeles County Museum and Tate Modern, Hyundai has boosted its image as an innovative company, applying artistic and technological values to its management and thereby establishing its unique brand philosophy.

Hyundai's art collaboration projects are centered on three C's: collection, creation, and communication.<sup>9</sup> These three key principles led Hyundai to recognize that it is futile to only support art for short-term gains, and instead committed the company to the realization of innovative visions for this age through collaboration.

Insisting that the independence and purity of artistic exhibitions and curation ought not to be undermined by commercial interests, Hyundai encourages the art community and enthusiasts to enjoy art freely and deepen their understanding of the humanities. The company sincerely aspires toward a productive collaboration between art and businesses, including itself.

#### **Fine Art Collaboration: Successes and Significance**

These are examples of successful fine art collaboration that enables creators to practice a more sophisticated level of art across mediums and genres, while also enhancing the businesses' brand images and pulling in customers. On the other hand, these successes are possible only when the messages and the medium used by the artists allow for creative freedom and match the brand image. Successful collaboration serves as a channel through which the

general public can become more familiarized with fine art. This process enables fine art to outgrow the boundaries of each medium and reinvent it to retain and boost its present value. The examples set by Unilever and Hyundai demonstrate that sustained corporate sponsorship of fine art can be essential for marketing purposes.

#### **Feasibility of Long-Term Fine Art Collaboration**

The kinds of art frequently involved in art collaboration explicitly serve industrial and practical purposes (e.g., design). It has been widely assumed that these practical forms of art could never converge with fine art.

Nevertheless, the tendency in contemporary art to favor art collaboration in pursuit of purity and uniqueness in design and commercialization of fine art has made it possible for different art forms to collaborate.

First, art collaboration is becoming more common as a form of conceptual art. Contemporary art is anticipated by a return to fine art by transcending the convergence of mediums and achieving a narrative intrinsic to art itself. The concept of the medium rooted in reductionist theories of modernist art and the new media art originating from digital mediums are shedding the concept of mediums based on medium-specific characteristics via the development of "post-medium conditions" today, and thereby finally settle in the world of fine art again. The broadening horizon for fine art leads us to envision new beginnings for a conceptual art that transcends the constraints of the medium.

Second, it is important to note the societal backdrop against which art collaboration began to emerge. The emergence of art collaboration coincided with the decentralization of art as it is no longer treated as the privilege of a few, but functioning as a new subject of fun and enjoyment in ordinary people's lives. The changing perception of the artist has facilitated the democratization of the environment in which artists work. Profit making has always remained businesses' main objective, but they, too, began to recognize the growing importance of communication with consumers. Fine art collaboration is therefore especially well-suited to the current trend, with consumers' demand for value ever-increasing. Consumers want products that serve as symbols of who they are, and original products of art collaboration can cater to that demand. This study affirms the feasibility of sustained and long-term collaboration with fine art.

## Results and Discussion

This study explores prospects and potentials for long-term collaboration between commerce and fine art. As Rosalind Krauss predicted, painting not only outgrew the medium in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but contemporary art itself now evolves by attempting new convergences of mediums and thereby expanding concepts. Contemporary art in the post-1970s era has been reinventing the medium, and re-creates the medium as well by not just combining tools and machines, but also by re-tracing the memories of the past in the layers of conventions.<sup>10</sup> The medium, which is recreated in memory, returns to the discourse intrinsic to art, attesting to the durability of fine art. Encounter with industries over and beyond collaboration between artists has also given art collaboration a new meaning. This study analyzes the examples of collaboration between corporations like Hyundai Motor and Unilever, on the one hand, and fine art, on the other, to understand how such examples have helped to expand general theory and also enhance prospects for long-term art collaboration. Businesses tend to prefer collaboration with design than with fine art because of their concerns with short-term profitmaking. This study, however, affirms the capability of fine art to address the deep essence of the brand itself. The rapid advancement of technology in the contemporary era has also drastically lowered the entry barrier to art by making it available via multiple media. Artists, too, work today not just to produce something to put on exhibitions, but also to pursue new courses of creativity. Businesses have begun to recognize the changing public perceptions of art and increasingly to choose art collaboration as forms of public communication in their efforts to strengthen their brands. The art community, artists, consumers, and businesses alike are changing amid the sweeping wave of the contemporary era, further strengthening the basis for long-term collaboration between commerce and fine art. Examples like the partnership between Unilever and Tate Modern and Hyundai's culture and art projects show how effectively art collaboration can strengthen brand images and values,

giving sponsoring companies new opportunities for profit making in the long run. Nevertheless, collaboration between fine art and commerce can never be measured using numbers only, like financial performance, because it offers immeasurable aesthetic values and significance.

## Conclusions

Actually, it is not only important to consider art collaboration as a marketing tool for a company, but also recent attempts to expand the horizons of new arts using technologies such as AI, 3D printing, and VR in art collaboration are equally important. And this progressive development of art collaboration is expected to gradually influence the convergence studies, industry and service. Moreover, a lot of research fields including art look forward to another leap forward in future studies.

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