



Dynamic Cultural Totem: Art and Intellectual Property Merchandise in Consumer Society

Tengfei Xu^{1,2}

¹School of future Design, Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China

²Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China

xutengfei@bnu.edu.cn

Abstract. With the boundaries between Chinese and foreign contemporary art practices gradually expanding and merging under a cross-disciplinary perspective, the intersection of art and commerce in consumer society has become increasingly intimate. This article presents and analyses case studies of artists working across these boundaries in the field of contemporary art, exploring the instability of "lowbrow art" and "elite art" as subcultures become mainstream. The dissemination of contemporary art works based on intellectual property rights has made them more popular, while hip-hop art has entered the halls of art museums, making itself elite. This change is closely related to its internal cultural causes and social values. The dynamic transformation and bridge between mass culture and elite culture in the game of art and commerce.

Keywords: Consumer Society; Lowbrow Art; Elite Art; Art and Business; Art Intellectual Property.

1 Introduction

The artists of the trend toy genre from both home and abroad have taken their IP development to the extreme. Although some of them have established themselves as elite artists in the art world, they have created a large number of derivatives and art works that are different from traditional museum exhibitions and are designed to serve and engage the general public. In the context of consumer society, artists have deeply reflected on the relationship between art and commerce both in their work and after it. Artists such as Keith Haring and Murakami have discussed and reflected on the crossover between art and commerce. The collision and intersection between "lowbrow art" and "elite art" in the art world is endless.[1] The graphic flatness of artists such as Keith Haring makes their work easier to consume visually. The artistic value and commercial value of such art works deserve reflection. In the context of consumer society, "mass" and "elite" art dynamic transformation at different stages. Their cultural causes and values deserve exploration and examination.

2 Is it a Work or a Commodity? The IP-based Communication of Art Works in Consumer Society

The introduction should briefly place the study in a broad context and highlight why it is important. It should define the purpose of the work and its significance. The current state of the research field should be carefully reviewed and key publications cited. Please highlight controversial and diverging hypotheses when necessary. Finally, briefly mention the main aim of the work and highlight the principal conclusions. As far as possible, please keep the introduction comprehensible to scientists outside your particular field of research. Artworks become 'products' or 'commodities' ... Some 'artists' believe they can 'transcend' this situation because they are 'pure' and have never participated in the 'commercialization' of popular culture because they do not do advertising or produce products specifically for the mass market, but they sell their work in galleries, and they have 'dealers' who control them and their work in a similar manner.[2] In fact, this pretense of being outside the system is more hypocritical than recognition or actual participation.

The art world is no purer than Madison Avenue, in fact, it is more depraved, a big lie". When asked about the relationship between the boundaries of cross-border art and commodity production, Murakami believed that he himself could not be called 'crossover'.[3] He mentioned that "for many years, we have been talking about the line in Japan, however, this line has not been defined so clearly. Regardless of culture, or the development of the post-war economic situation. The Japanese accept the integration of art and commerce, in fact, they are astonished by the rigidity and pretentiousness of 'high art' in the Western world and the rigid hierarchical system".

However, despite Murakami's denial of his crossover, in fact, the rigid art system in the West that he dislikes has been broken through. Once an artist becomes famous, he is bound to enter the halls of museums or the mainstream art world again. In this regard, the process of identity transformation of Murakami and Keith Haring is consistent, whether it stems from business, interest, or emotional expression. The sunflower, a typical image, is fundamentally consistent with Keith Haring's Hollow Man, Baby, and Dog in the field of IP communication and diffusion. Because once their works and identities become the objects sought after by the public and the art elite, the boundaries between these so-called "high art" and "low art" will inevitably be blurred. In 2001, Murakami established his own company, Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. in Japan".

In addition to constantly creating his own works, Murakami also manages and promotes young artists and organizes international projects and art fairs. He compares his business to a record company, providing young artists with career planning and various support. He attempts to establish an original and sustainable art market in Japan. This approach is extremely similar to Keith Haring's original intention. In 2008, Murakami converted the underground of his Tokyo studio into a gallery, and in addition to managing his young artists, he also curated exhibitions of well-known artists such as Mark Grotjahn.[4] It has now expanded to four separate locations within the Nakano Broadway shopping mall in Tokyo. Artists working in a similar man-

ner, whether it is Yayoi Kusama or Yayoi Kusama, whom we will discuss later, The operation of personal brand and the spread of personal image IP are indelible.

Graffiti artist Keith Haring's work expression forms cross-border fields involving sculptures, painting, installation, behavior, video, body painting, and many other fields. The studio model is undoubtedly a model and example that the above living artists continue to follow.

Although Keith Haring has been gone for many years, this studio, store, cultural and creative derivatives, and cross-border integrated cooperation continue to operate under the operation of his foundation. In terms of content, it is widely cross-border again in combination with business: including: Keith Haring's works during his lifetime in cooperation with the German automotive brand BMW, the vodka brand "Absolut Vodka" in the Swedish southern town, Lucky Strike cigarettes, and the foundation since his death has worked with many such as: DKNY, the Japanese clothing brand UNIQLO, the 1941 New York Manhattan light luxury brand Coach, the British clothing brand Nicholas Kirkwood, and the Hollywood world fashion trend brand Joyrich. So far, Keith Haring's artistic image has spread all over the world. Not only that, but in China, the artist Xu Zhen's Madein company advocates "the brand is more important than the individual, and the brand is more efficient than the individual".

However, the sculptor couple Xiang Jing and Qu Guangci founded "Xi Qi Art" in Beijing in 2010, with the name "Xi Qi Art" (X+Q) taken from the abbreviations of their surnames, which perfectly combined art and commerce and was a great success as a typical case in China. In other cases, derivative films were created based on the creation elements and symbols of contemporary artists, through limited edition reproduction, such as Sui Jianuo's "Little Red Dinosaur", Zhou Chunya's "Green Dog", Liu Ye's "Doll", Shen Jingdong's "Rounded Soldier" and many other refined derivatives that linked art and commerce perfectly on a large scale.

3 The Instability of "Lowbrow Art" and "Elite Art" in the Context of Consumer Society

The commodification of art, the artification of commodities, and the melding of "lowbrow art" and "elite art" are all related to their instability. Lowbrow art, as popularly known, originated in Los Angeles in the 1970s. Although art critics and scholars attempted to make this style of art acceptable to "highbrow" commercial galleries and institutions of learning by giving it a fancier and more contemporary art historical title - "pop surrealism" - the word "lowbrow" itself means vulgar and vulgar in English. In the Chinese world, the term "lowbrow art" is often translated directly as "lowbrow art". "Lowbrow" is a translation that is formed by breaking down the root words (low and brow) and rearranging them. In contrast, elite art represents refined art. A school of bourgeois art and culture, it creates art for a small number of "elites" who believe that only they can appreciate and accept the "mysterious" high-creative spirit of the elite in the history of art. [5] The emergence of the elite tendency in art is the result of the separation and opposition of art from other forms of activity and the separation of art from the interests of the vast majority of the people.

Whether Western, Japanese, or domestic artists, their methods, approaches, and those of Keith Haring are highly consistent. The branding of artists, the commercialization of art, the diversification of media, and the tight integration with commodities are all analogous to Keith Haring. In the context of consumer society, the production capacity of art branding is far greater than the efforts made by individuals, Especially in the field of animation or the spread of cartoon images, etc.

And these artists have responded to the trend of the times and followed its pace, which is naturally accepted by the public and widely circulated, whether in the field of art or consumption. Artistic practice, like any formalized discipline, is a prisoner of its history. It has always been a highly specialized activity that requires a great deal of learning and inner effort from its practitioners and live audiences. In other words, these activities will always accompany its existence.

From the perspective of production and consumption of art, the theorist Baxandall has investigated the three parts of the art world from the perspectives of production, consumption, and art works. Although he studies the painting of the Italian Renaissance in different chapters, his theory is equally effective in the analysis of Keith Haring's work. However, in the context of this confrontation between "advanced art", "elegant art", and "elite art" and "low-level art", "lowbrow art", the combination of business and art, and the crossover of various fields of cultural and artistic is a highly visible case. In fact, sociologist Bourdieu pointed out at the same time that people's knowledge of art in different social classes is related to taste and social class. Respondents from the upper class are more likely to report the names of twelve or more classical composers and claim, "I have the same interest in abstract painting as classical painting." Different social classes talk about art in different ways".

The Keith Haring case mentioned multiple times in this article shows that the graffiti art has gradually entered the elite class and entered the public space of art museums through improvement. This also proves that many things are not static. Many elegant works themselves were still "popular" works in the social context at that time. There is a view on the seriousness of elegant art that "elegant art carries serious intellectual and aesthetic experience. In the art of creator orientation, the audience must conform to the art form and always pay attention to the artist's intentions. Conversely, in the art of audience orientation, the artist must pay attention to the needs of the audience and make the meaning of the work clear and understandable." [6] Therefore, it is also an inevitable factor for the audience to conform to the artist's guiding thinking. However, since the difference between high and low art does not come from its inherent specialty, where does it come from? This raises our thinking, that is, under the background of consumer society, the cultural reasons and values for the gradual commercialization and IPization of art?

4 Existence Implies Rationality: Exploring and Tracing the Culture, Reasons and Values

Just as Keith Haring's "Pop Shop" serves as a typical case of the integration of the border between elegant and vulgar art forms. Is there a fundamental difference be-

tween beautiful art, popular art, and folk art? Such a clear concept of art classification is an important issue for the art community. On the one hand, there is "elegant" (high) art composed of various beautiful arts, and on the other hand, there is "low" (low-brow) art composed of "true" term popular folk art, commercialized "mass" art, or popular art. Some scholars believe that the difference between the two types is purely "natural" and requires no sociological analysis. However, it is difficult to be convincing by explaining the differences of various types based on the internal special characteristics of art forms. For example, a common claim is that beautiful art is more complex than popular art and seems "better."

Based on the discussion of "low-level art" and "high-level art" in the context of consumer society, and on the basis of the frequent collision and integration of "low-brow art" and "elite art", the causes of the formation of the above cases and cross-border elements lie in the direct result of globalization and the global village. These reasons for globalization and commercialization can be attributed to the following reasons.

First, the cultural reasons and the convergence of values have provided a cultural basis for the phenomenon of cross-border combination. After the Cold War, contemporary art, which once represented Western political culture, lost its original meaning. In a relatively open environment, the old political culture lost its original value and significance. The images reflected in Keith Haring's works are mostly drawn from life and the fantasies of the inner world.

Second, the consensus of interests and values has enabled the phenomenon of frequent emergence to be widely recognized. Starting from Pop Art, the advocating of mass culture and consumer civilization has been obvious. However, in Keith Haring's era, this kind of singing and advocating of consumer civilization and machine society was even more pronounced.[7] Even today, his image and derivatives can be seen everywhere worldwide.

Finally, the industrial production of cultural products and the widespread dissemination and integration made possible by the complex and diverse ways of touching elite art. For example, the promotion mechanism for works and authors has developed rapidly. From pocket editions books to CDs, movies, videos, documentaries, or television, even the spread of the Internet has been widely developed. At the same time, this behavior has involved more popular cultural fields and the production of cultural products. From popular music to TV shows, from documentary biographies to movies. As long as there is a market, it will absorb more creation.

5 Conclusions

Many artists take into account the relationship between art and commerce in their creation process; cultural and creative derivatives are combined with cross-border. Murakami and Keith Haring's "store" is a typical case of the integration of the border between high and low art forms. Completely reflects the gradually expanding and disappearing boundary of contemporary Chinese and foreign art in the field of discipline intersection. Art and commerce are increasingly integrated in the context of

consumer society. The article lists and analyzes the case of cross-border artists in the contemporary art field, exploring the instability of "low brow art" and "elite art". Once subcultures move towards the mainstream, their status will change accordingly. The IP communication of contemporary art works makes it more popular, while the toys and art works that enter the galleries and museums make it more elite. This change is closely related to its internal cultural reasons and social values. The marriage of commerce and art allows popular culture and elite culture to dynamically transform and merge in the game. The analysis and exploration of the cases in this article can initially clarify the many reasons behind this problem: that is, the in-depth exploration of the culture behind it, the pursuit of the benefits and the value orientation of art, and the important significance of cultural products in the industrial society, etc.

Authors' Contributions

Dr. Xu Tengfei is an associate professor in charge of scientific research at School of Future Design, Beijing Normal University. He teaches courses thesis writing and art history for undergraduates and graduate students of the entire university. In this thesis, he was responsible for writing, submission, translation and revision.

Acknowledgments

The work was supported by The Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities (1233200018); Zhuhai Philosophy and Social Science Planning Project (2023GJ103); Research Startup Project for Talents Introduction of Beijing Normal University (310432102); Beijing Normal University 2023 Teaching Construction and Reform Project (jx2023065).

References

1. Meyer, Tirza. "To Rescue What Is Left to Rescue." In *Elisabeth Mann Borgese and the Law of the Sea*, 201–26. Brill, 2022. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctv2kqwzgg.16>.
2. Chellis House Feminist Resource Center and Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies department. *Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies Spring 2020 Newsletter*. Letters (Correspondence), 2020. <https://jstor.org/stable/community.35434508>.
3. Nickleson, Patrick. "Writing Minimalism: The Theatre of Eternal Music and the Historiography of Drones." In *The Names of Minimalism: Authorship, Art Music, and Historiography in Dispute*, 46–88. University of Michigan Press, 2023. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.10207791.7>.
4. Jane Gladstone Castro; Guan Huixin, Mixed Identities - An Interview with Murakami. *World Fine Arts*, 2009; pp.13–16.
5. Phillips, Natalie E. "The Radiant (Christ) Child: Keith Haring and the Jesus Movement." *American Art* 21, no. 3 (2007): 54–73. <https://doi.org/10.1086/526480>.

6. Meyer, Tirza. "To Rescue What Is Left to Rescue." In *Elisabeth Mann Borgese and the Law of the Sea*, 201–26. Brill, 2022. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctv2kqvwzgg.16>.
7. Prithy Adhikary, and Larry Szycher. *Beauty and Fear: Exploring Deadly Pathogens through My Eyes*. Documents, 2020. <https://jstor.org/stable/community.36366732>.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

