

**SELLING AMERICAN ART:
CELEBRITY AND SUCCESS IN THE
POSTWAR NEW YORK ART MARKET**

By

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**A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ABSTRACT	iii
CHAPTERS	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 AUTHENTICATION: MOMA, MONEY, AND “THE MIND OF EUROPE”	11
3 CULTIVATION: MERCHANTS AND MARKETING	28
4 DISSEMINATION: MASS MEDIA MYTH-MAKING	41
5 CONCLUSION	53
BIBLIOGRAPHY	56
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	70

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During the 1950s, contemporary modern American art experienced unprecedented fame and prosperity. Collectors began to patronize vanguard American painting, dramatically increasing its market value. The celebrity of Abstract Expressionism grew so that it was renowned both in New York art circles and in mainstream audiences. This paper investigates how the financial and public relations “triumph” of American painting came about through the activities of art institutions, dealers, and the mass media—how vanguard art was sold, literally and ideologically, to Americans.

The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York played an important role in endorsing vanguard American art. Although emphatic support was slow to develop, by 1959 the Museum had clearly approved Abstract Expressionism and opened its doors to new American art. MoMA’s sponsorship helped increase prices of vanguard American art and make the New York School known in Europe.

Audience-oriented art dealers, such as Sidney Janis and Leo Castelli, promoted the new art to cultivate new collectors. Novice collectors from middlebrow backgrounds became major vanguard art patrons. These collectors publicized their purchases and collections to increase their own social status and prominence. This publicity further stimulated the art market.

The mass media disseminated information about the activities of museums, dealer, and collectors to “lay” audiences. Prominent vanguard artists, like Jackson Pollock, and collectors, such as the Sculls, were mythologized in the mass magazines. This kind of unprecedented media attention to vanguard American art was the ultimate sign of success.

Not surprisingly, as celebrity and success increased, the radicality of vanguard art was called into question. Commercialism and popularity devastated avant-garde tendencies. The tremendous success of vanguard American art in the postwar period forced confrontation with the contradictions inherent in the contemporary art market.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Contemporary modern American art experienced unprecedented success after World War II: for the first time, vanguard American art received significant attention from museums and collectors, enjoyed steady sales at high prices, and benefited from mass media exposure.¹ Artists became celebrities, famous not only in New York art cliques, but also with mainstream audiences. This “triumph of American painting”—to borrow Irving Sandler’s phrase²—was a combination of fame and financial success; as one critic summarized pithily, “Never before has there been so great an interest in art. Never before has the interest on art investments been so great.”³

When one thinks of well-known modern American art, Pop is likely to come to mind. Pop Art may have been the most notorious American tendency, but by the time of its advent in 1962, the culture industry apparatus for promoting vanguard American art was already well established. Celebrity and financial success were pioneered by Abstract Expressionism. Scholars such as Serge Guilbaut, Eva Cockcroft, and Max Kozloff have investigated why New

¹ I employ the term “vanguard” throughout this paper to refer to the newest modern art being produced at the time, primarily in New York City.

² I use this celebratory phrase somewhat sarcastically. Sandler’s “triumph” consists of a rather uncritical discussion of artists’ intentions and their “feeling that something of consequence had been achieved in American art.” *The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 269.

³ Robert Wraight, *The Art Game* (London: L. Frewing, 1965), p. 14.

York art was so successful in the period just after World War II.⁴ This paper will examine *how* success was achieved: how vanguard American art was sold—literally and ideologically—to mainstream Americans.⁵

In “Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts,” Thomas Crow suggests that the avant-garde “discovered, renewed, or reinvented itself” by appropriating materials and motifs from mass or popular culture.⁶ According to Crow, avant-garde art exploits “the culture of the commodity . . . to critical purpose.”⁷ The infusion of kitsch into high art soon ceases to be shocking, however, and “legitimated modernism is in turn repackaged for consumption as chic and kitsch commodities. The work of the avant-garde is returned to the sphere of culture where much of its substantial material originated.”⁸ Although Crow uses Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, and Cubism as his primary examples, his thesis clearly applies to Pop Art and more recent movements. Abstract Expressionism, however, followed a different path.

⁴ Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). Cockcroft, “Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War,” *Artforum* 15 (June 1974), 39-41. Kozloff, “American Painting During the Cold War,” *Artnews* 13 (May 1973), 43-54.

⁵ By “mainstream Americans,” I mean primarily white, upper and middle class, Judeo-Christian families—the audience to which mass magazines like *Life*, *Time*, and *Vogue* appealed. In the postwar era, these people were made to represent the “American people” despite the actual diversity of the population. Marginalized groups may have experienced vanguard art differently or not at all. Unfortunately information about such groups’ interactions with art is scarce. For a study of marginalized Abstract Expressionists, see Ann Eden Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

⁶ *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 3.

⁷ p. 25.

⁸ Crow, p. 35.

In opposition to the popular and commercial proclivities of Regionalism and in horror at the mass-marketed atomic war, the New York School attempted to divorce its imagery from all vestiges of mass and popular culture after World War II.⁹ Yet, despite the introspective abstraction of this art, it was still seized upon by the culture industry, marketed to the masses, and popularized. Moreover, this popularization seems all the more significant because of the art's elitist beginnings.

It is not surprising that art succumbed to the broad consumerist trend of the 1950s. Like many small businesses at the time, high art had to expand or be obliterated by its mass-merchandising competitors (in this case, popular and mass culture). In the late 1940s, Abstract Expressionism became the industry leader of vanguard American art; within a few years it held a virtual monopoly, reaching unprecedented audiences for contemporary modern art and selling at record prices. Not only did vanguard American art become famous at this time, but the kind of fame, rather than deriving from the uniqueness of the art object, suggested the aura of the commodity—the notoriety of high prices, market competition, and aggressive mass media promotion.¹⁰

A “support system,” as Deirdre Robson terms it, developed to nurture the popular and financial success of vanguard American art.¹¹ Attention from cultural institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA)

⁹ For a discussion of Regionalism and commercial art, see Erika Doss, “The Art of Cultural Politics: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism,” *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War*, ed. Lary May (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

¹⁰ One could argue that this type of consumerist fame was specifically American and particularly rampant in the 1950s.

¹¹ *Prestige, Profit, and Pleasure: The Market for Modern Art in New York in the 1940s and 1950s* (New York: Garland Pub., 1995), *passim*.

authenticated its importance. A market of collectors was cultivated by savvy art dealers. Additionally, the mass media disseminated images of paintings and painters to the “lay” public. These activities, which brought previously inconceivable fame and fortune to vanguard American art in the post-war years, will be discussed in the following chapters. First a brief introduction to the New York art market is needed.

The end of World War II was marked by economic prosperity. Still suffering from war shortages of common goods, consumers eagerly spent money on various luxury items. Art collecting entered a “boom,” as both sales and prices increased. During this early part of the boom, however, relatively little vanguard American art sold. In *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, Serge Guilbaut describes how New York won (or stole) the concept of modern art from Paris. But, although New York may have captured the *idea* of modern art by 1948, as Guilbaut argues, virtually no market for American vanguard painting yet existed. By 1948, the Abstract Expressionists were acclaimed within the modern art world but had yet to make themselves known to collectors; consequently, they were still far from financial success.¹² Irving Sandler admits that Abstract Expressionism was recognized primarily by the artists themselves in 1952, the ending date of his

¹² Guilbaut concludes his discussion with 1948. At this time American moderns like Stuart Davis and Ben Shahn were already established artists whose prestige made them neither vanguard nor marketless. Abstract Expressionists were the new vanguard. Although prices of Abstract Expressionist works more than doubled between 1946 and 1949, sales were slow. The highest price paid for one of Jackson Pollock’s paintings through 1950 was \$2,350 (paid by MoMA for *Number One*), and few sold for more than \$800. These figures are paltry compared to an average price of \$4,500 for a recent painting by Davis, \$10,000 for a Mondrian, and up to \$20,000 for a contemporary Picasso (earlier Picassos and Impressionist works sold for over \$100,000). Paintings by other Abstract Expressionist were priced slightly lower than Pollock’s. Robson, *Prestige, Profit, and Pleasure*, pp. 229-234; Robson, “The Market for Abstract Expressionism: The Time-Lag Between Critical and Commercial Acceptance,” *Archives of American Art Journal* 25 (1985, #3), 20-22.

much less critical book, *The Triumph of American Painting*.¹³ This date is also several years before market victory.

Through the early 1950s, American modern art collectors were exemplified by MoMA trustees: extremely wealthy, industrialist families with histories of art collecting. These collectors favored European “Modern Old Masters” such as Renoir, Van Gogh, Cézanne, Gauguin, Picasso, and Matisse. Collectors with smaller budgets chose Braque, Gris, Rouault, Modigliani or established Americans like Hopper and Kuniyoshi.¹⁴ During the 1950s, the popularity and prices of Abstract Expressionism increased slowly. In the early part of the decade, collectors affiliated with MoMA purchased a few New York School paintings. Around the time of Jackson Pollock’s death in 1956, demand increased tremendously, and throughout the last years of the decade prices rapidly escalated.¹⁵ Once the first generation of the New York School achieved financial success, it came much faster to younger artists.¹⁶

¹³ p. 2.

¹⁴ For American modern art collector preferences see, “The Businessman and Picasso,” *Fortune Magazine* (June 1950), 102-110; “Chicago’s Fabulous Collectors,” *Life Magazine* October 27, 1952, pp. 92-99; “Fifty-seventh Street,” pp. 144-151, 197-202; James Thrall Soby, “Collecting Today’s Pictures,” *Saturday Review of Literature* May 25, 1946, pp. 42-44; Soby, “The State of Collecting,” *Saturday Review of Literature* August 2, 1952, pp. 38-39.

¹⁵ Between 1950 and 1956, Pollock prices almost doubled from \$2,000-\$5,000 to \$3,000-\$8,000. After his death, they jumped as high as \$30,000. By the end of the decade “even relatively modest works” could retail for \$10,000, and larger works, in the thirty thousands. De Koonings rose from \$3,000 in 1952, to about \$8,000, and up to \$14,000 by 1959 (the year his solo show sold out on opening day for a total of \$150,000). Hofmanns fetched up to \$8,500 and Gottliebs about \$6,000 by this time also. Rothkos highest sale was \$1,250 in 1951, but in 1958 most works were priced at \$5,000. Lesser-known Abstract Expressionists also experienced higher and higher prices. Even figuring in the 22% inflation of this period, prices were substantially higher. Robson, *Prestige, Profit, and Pleasure*, pp. 242, 248-251; Robson, “The Market for Abstract Expressionism,” pp. 20-22; “Boom on Canvas,” *Time Magazine* April 7, 1958, p. 80; Marvin Elkoff, “The American Painter as a Blue Chip,” *Esquire* (January 1965), 39.

¹⁶ As Jennifer Wells notes, “For both younger and older artists financial

It is often assumed that the nearly instantaneous success of Pop Art was due to its familiar, representational, consumer imagery. Numerous survey textbooks and even more critical discussions suggest that the accessible iconography of the movement appealed to the “laity” and encouraged a new kind of collector, the uncultured, *nouveau riche* businessman.¹⁷ Executives like Robert Scull and Leon Kraushar are thought to have been more receptive to images that reinforced the importance of their own role in consumer culture, “reassuring images of the consumer environment.”¹⁸ Most Pop collectors, however, had first become involved with vanguard art by purchasing Abstract Expressionist paintings.¹⁹ Certainly Pop images did affirm the business in which most collectors were engaged, but this strategy may not have been the art’s primary appeal. Leon Kraushar’s statement that Pop “spoke directly to me about things I

momentum developed at roughly the same time in the late fifties and early sixties.” “Pop Goes the Market,” *Definitive Statements: American Art 1964-66* (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University, List Art Center, 1986), p. 56. While most Abstract Expressionists required over a decade for their prices to increase from below \$1,000 to \$5,000-\$15,000 and to regularly sell out solo exhibitions, the same growth occurred for Pop artists in less than five years. By 1965 large Abstract Expressionist and Pop paintings cost \$25,000-\$45,000. Wells, p. 57; Elkoff, pp. 38-41; “Sold Out Art,” *Life Magazine* September 20, 1963, pp. 126, 128-129; Richard Feigen, “Art ‘Boom’: Inflationary Hedge and Deflationary Refuge,” *Arts Magazine* 41 (November 1966), 24.

¹⁷ Examples range from Samuel Hunter and Jacob Jacobus, *Modern Art*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), p. 299 to Christin J. Mamiya, *Pop Art and Consumer Culture: American Super Market* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), p. 149.

¹⁸ Mamiya, p. 149.

¹⁹ Pop was only a tiny percentage of the collections of Robert Scull and Harry Abrams although they were renowned as Pop collectors. Scull actually owned more Abstract Expressionism than Pop. Allene Talmey, “Art is the Core,” *Vogue* 144 (July 1964), 123; “At Home With Henry,” *Time Magazine* February 21, 1964, p. 71. Burton and Emily Tremaine, Albert and Vera List, and Philip Johnson, known for their Abstract Expressionism collections, also patronized Pop.

understood” is often quoted.²⁰ But Kraushar also said, “These pictures are like IBM stock, don’t forget that, and this is the time to buy,” and, “I don’t even look at the pictures. I just know they’re there and that I have the biggest and best collection in the world.”²¹ In light of these latter comments, it seems clear that for some collectors, the imagery was not the most interesting aspect of Pop Art after all.

Certainly there are many reasons beyond aesthetics for collecting art. Jean Baudrillard suggests that “the exercise of a collection is valued above the thematic of the objects collected.”²² The *exercise* of the collection, the choosing and buying of paintings, fraternizing with artists, and being part of the “art scene,” was important to collectors like Scull who visited artists’ studios and gave dinner parties for art world acquaintances. In fact, Thomas Hess complained in 1964 that vanguard collectors were more interested in socializing with artists than in their art.²³ Art collecting might also confer a kind of prestige or social status to its participants; Scull admitted that one of the reasons he purchased art was for “social climbing.”²⁴ He enjoyed his reputation as a

²⁰ John Rublowsky, *Pop Art*, photo. Ken Heyman (New York: Basic Books, 1965), p. 157.

²¹ “You Bought It Now You Live with It,” *Life Magazine* July 16, 1965, pp. 60-61.

²² *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981), p. 110.

²³ “A Tale of Two Cities,” *Location 1* (Summer 1964); reprinted in *The New Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1973), pp. 89-90. Hess was managing editor of *Artnews*.

²⁴ Gregoire Muller, “Points of View: A Taped Conversation with Robert C. Scull,” *Arts Magazine* 45 (November 1970), 39. For a highly entertaining account of the Sculls’ social ascent through art, see Tom Wolfe, “Bob and Spike,” *The Pump House Gang* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1968), pp. 173-203.

collector, saying, “Don’t think I don’t like all the attention. I love it.”²⁵ Not least of all, art could be a lucrative investment.²⁶ In a 1958 survey, collectors ranked their reasons for collecting in order of importance: decoration, investment/tax benefits, social prestige, historical completeness, current power and posthumous glory, patronage, and lastly, love of art.²⁷

Traditionally collectors waited for new art to be sanctioned by critics and time, but increasingly throughout the 1950s newness itself became valuable. To achieve acceptance, new art only needed adequate attention. Hess lamented that the vanguard audience wanted most of all to appear modern by supporting the New.²⁸ In fact a cult of newness has appeared with every great industrial revolution. At these economic boom times large numbers of people have enough money to buy new things, while the conformity of mass production and consumerism drives them to seek novel distractions. Growth in mass media also tends to occur at these times and becomes a vehicle for advertisers. A hegemonic

²⁵ “You Bought It Now You Live with It,” p. 59.

²⁶ A few particularly notorious examples: Jackson Pollock’s *Blue Poles* sold for \$6,000 in 1954 to Dr. Fred Olsen. In 1957 Ben Heller paid \$32,000 for the painting, and he sold it to the National Gallery of Australia for over two million dollars in 1973. The same year Scull auctioned a large part of his collection at Sotheby Parke-Bernet for a \$2,242,900, a profit of several thousand percent according to Calvin Tomkins, *Off the Wall: Robert Rauschenberg and the Art World of Our Time* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1980), p. 296.

²⁷ From a survey of participants at a Brooklyn Museum seminar on private collecting; Alice Goldfarb Marquis, *Alfred H. Barr, Jr.: Missionary for the Modern* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1989), p. 293.

²⁸ “A Tale of Two Cities,” pp. 89-90. That the harshest adjective used by art critics in the 1950s was “derivative,” illustrates the importance of novelty. Some early accounts of the interest in newness: Hess, “The Phony Crisis in American Art,” *Artnews* 62 (Summer 1963), 25-27; comments by Robert Richenburg in Dorothy Gees Seckler, “Artist in America: Victim of the Culture Boom,” *Art in America* 51 (December 1963), 36; Harold Rosenberg, “The New as Value,” *The Anxious Object: Art Today and Its Audience* (New York: Horizon Press, 1964), pp. 227-235; Elkoﬀ, 41-42.

relationship develops between the consumers' desire for the New, and the constant parade of products supplied by the media.²⁹ Art is no different from any other commodity in this system; new products must be released constantly to stimulate interest and sales.

High art assumes the aura of the commodity. Marx describes commodities as sensuous, mystical objects, divorced from both their social and intrinsic values. This description is somewhat similar to Walter Benjamin's characterization of aura as originality and authenticity produced by a feeling of distance from an artwork.³⁰ Both types of aura derive from the disparity between the physical object and what it signifies—here between paint on canvas and the connotations associated with collecting the newest, most vanguard art. In addition, newness supplies a kind of authenticity to commodities. The desire for new products also mimics a search for originality. The great concern about conformity in the postwar era perhaps increased the value of new ideas to consumers who wanted to reaffirm their individuality. An interest in vanguard art could be a defense against middlebrow banality.

Baudrillard explains that no fashion has intrinsic value or meaning, but only signifies an opposition to other fashions. His example—appropriate for the time period under consideration—is that the mini-skirt is intrinsically neither

²⁹ This pattern can be seen in America in the 1890s, the 1920s, the 1950s, and today (now television substitutes for print media). See Richard M. Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Verso, 1996) for an early history of the relationship between mass media, culture, and consumption.

³⁰ Karl Marx, "The Meaning of Human Requirements," *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 98; Marx, "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof," *Capital, Volume One*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 319-329; Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, Ed. H. Arendt, Trans. H. Zorn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 218-219, 223-225.

more nor less beautiful than the long skirt. Rather each style is defined in opposition to the previous fashion.³¹ Similarly, no artistic style or movement is inherently more beautiful or important than another, but each is posited against previous movements. A new fashion in art is valued for its difference from previous styles more than for any particular characteristics embodied. In the vanguard art market, Pop was valuable just because it was different from its immediate predecessor, Abstract Expressionism, regardless of aesthetics and imagery.³²

A series of new movements of vanguard art helped to perpetuate New York's tentative status as capital of the art world. The successive bombardment of novel styles could command interest through newness and shock-value alone, but if American art stagnated, collectors might seek new diversions in European art. As Abstract Expressionism grew stale in the late 1950s, this was a very real threat. Castelli spoke of the boredom of gallery visitors, suggesting that Jasper Johns was "so special" because he was something new and different.³³ The words "so special" could be interpreted as "so successful"; Johns's first show with Castelli sold out. The foundation for such notable success was established in the 1950s through the actions of art institutions, dealers, and the mass media.

³¹ Baudrillard, p. 79.

³² This kind of analysis applies to art as a *commodity*. Individuals might have personal preferences for one style or another, but from a holistic perspective, the market is indifferent to style so long as there is a *new* style.

³³ Emile de Antonio and Mitch Tuchman, eds, *Painters Painting: A Candid History of the Modern Art Scene, 1940-1970* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984), pp. 100-101.

CHAPTER 2 AUTHENTICATION: MOMA, MONEY, AND “THE MIND OF EUROPE”

Life Magazine's 1949 article about Jackson Pollock gives the following explanation of why the artist is worthy of the reader's attention: “His paintings hang in five U.S. museums and 40 private collections. Exhibiting in New York last winter, he sold 12 out of 18 pictures. Moreover, his work has stirred up a fuss in Italy, and this autumn he is slated for a one-man show in *avant-garde* Paris, where he is fast becoming the most talked-of and controversial U.S. painter.”¹ Based on this information, we are to understand that Pollock is significant because his work is represented in institutions, because it sells well in New York, and because the European “*avant-garde*” is interested in him.² These three forms of certification were necessary for the acceptance of vanguard American art and will be the main topics of this chapter.

Life also mentions Pollock's critical success, reporting that “a formidably high-brow New York critic hailed [Pollock] as a major artist of our time and a fine candidate to become ‘the greatest American painter of the 20th Century,’”³ In addition to the mocking tone used, however, the article discredits this critic

¹ “Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?” *Life Magazine* August 8, 1949, p. 42. (original italics)

² Similar credentials are listed for artists in other articles. The phrase “*avant-garde*” (always italicized) is scattered liberally throughout *Life's* discussions of art. For *Life* “*avant-garde*” bestowed a Continental mystique and sophistication on the art described, the magazine itself, and its discerning readers.

³ “Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?” p. 42.

opinions of Pollock. From this account, critical success seems less important than the other factors mentioned. The issue of critical acclaim and its impact (or lack thereof) on the art market will also be discussed here.

Several New York museums were influential in gaining acceptance for vanguard American art, including the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Jewish Museum, but none more so than the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA).⁴ Trustee Paul Sachs said in 1954, “Through courageous, audacious, and crusading leadership, the Museum has changed the climate of public opinion from one of hostility to one that is today open-minded and receptive to all aspects of modern art.”⁵ While this self-congratulatory statement is exaggerated, MoMA’s purchases, exhibitions, and the advice museum staff dispensed to collectors certainly helped to promote modern art. The Museum thereby functioned as a tastemaker, greatly affecting the art market.

One of MoMA’s primary missions was to gather a permanent collection of “the most important *living* masters” to put forth “a consistent idea of what is going on in American and the rest of the world.”⁶ Although MoMA described this collecting strategy as “risk-taking”—Alfred Barr said that if one out of ten

⁴ The Whitney furthered vanguard American art with annual exhibitions of new work, but these shows were too inclusive to have much tastemaking impact; see A. Deirdre Robson, *Prestige, Profit, and Pleasure: The Market for Modern Art in New York in the 1940s and 1950s* (New York: Garland Pub., 1995), pp. 54-55. The Jewish Museum became more important in the 1960s with a number of mid-career retrospectives of vanguard American artists. Several of the trustees at this time were major vanguard collectors and Director Alan Solomon was also interested in the new art.

⁵ Russell Lynes, *Good Old Modern: An Intimate Portrait of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), p. 352.

⁶ Barr, “A New Art Museum” (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1929); in *Defining Modern Art: Selected Writings of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.* eds. Irving Sandler and Amy Newman (New York: Abrams, 1986), p. 71. (original italics)

paintings that MoMA purchased stood the test of time, that would be a good record—I would suggest that the purchase of a work by MoMA established that work’s reputation, and therefore was not risky for the Museum at all.⁷

MoMA concentrated primarily on early twentieth-century European art through the 1940s, but the Museum also bought some vanguard American art. By 1950 several of the most prominent Abstract Expressionists were represented in the collection.⁸ However MoMA did not have many funds for buying new art. Most acquisitions were not purchases, but gifts from trustees, and most of the trustees were not very sympathetic to vanguard American art. Barr, Director of the the Museum’s Collections, selected or approved nearly all works the Museum purchased, but Barr then had to secure the acquisitions committee’s approval, a process that was sometimes quite a battle. Barr wrote of 1948, “Early in the year, some older members of the Committee on the Museum Collections, encouraged by adverse newspaper criticism, vigorously questioned the validity of certain acquisitions, including paintings called ‘abstract expressionist.’”

⁷ Leo Steinberg, “Contemporary Art and the Plight of Its Public,” *Harper’s Magazine* (March 1962); in *The New Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1973), p. 224.

⁸ Throughout the 1940s there were numerous complaints about the museum’s lack of commitment to vanguard American art. The Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors published attacks on the museum in 1942, 1943, and 1944. Lynes, p. 230. See also: Emily Genauer, “The Fur-Lined Museum,” *Harper’s Magazine* 189 (July 1944), 129-38. However (or perhaps in response to such criticism) MoMA acquired (by purchase or gift; * denotes gift) paintings by Arshile Gorky in 1941*, 1942, and 1950; Pollock in 1944 and 1950; Robert Motherwell in 1944 and 1950; Adolph Gottlieb in 1946*; William Baziotis in 1947; Willem de Kooning in 1948. Museum of Modern Art, *Painting and Sculpture in the Museum of Modern Art, 1929-1967* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1977), pp. 635-637. Still Clement Greenberg felt that the 1948-1949 MoMA exhibition, “American Paintings from the Museum Collection,” included “scandalously few” examples of Abstract Expressionism. Alice Goldfarb Marquis, *Alfred H. Barr, Jr.: Missionary for the Modern* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1989), pp. 248-249.

Purchase was difficult.” Later, in 1952, a member resigned from the committee because a painting by Mark Rothko was acquired.⁹

Barr was not devoted to Abstract Expressionism. In 1955 he was unable to raise \$8,000 to purchase Pollock’s *Autumn Rhythm* for MoMA. He decided that the work was more important after Pollock’s death in 1956, but at that time the price rose to \$30,000, which he again considered too high.¹⁰ Yet enough Abstract Expressionist paintings were acquired during the 1950s to suggest MoMA’s endorsement of the movement.¹¹ By 1958 Barr was ready for a rebellion against Abstract Expressionism, which he found in Jasper Johns.¹² MoMA acquired three works from Johns’s first show at Leo Castelli’s gallery in 1958.

By the early 1960s, MoMA’s support of vanguard American art was unquestionable. The Museum owned major works not only of Abstract Expressionism, but also of Post-Painterly Abstraction, Pop Art, and other new styles.¹³ Moreover, it had become commonplace for MoMA to purchase works at

⁹ From Barr’s “Chronicle” of the collection; quoted in Irving Sandler’s introduction to *Defining Modern Art*, p. 30. Barr was allowed to buy works for under \$1000 without seeking the committee’s approval. Dealer Leo Castelli was known to occasionally lower the price of a painting so that Barr could circumvent the hostile committee. William Rubin reports that the committee changed markedly in the 1960s and that by the time he succeeded Barr in 1967, it was quite liberal. Lynes, p. 300.

¹⁰ Marquis, p. 297. The Metropolitan bought the painting, illustrating just how accepted Abstract Expressionism had become.

¹¹ MoMA acquired (by purchase or gift; * denotes gift) paintings by Pollock in 1952 (two)*, 1957 (two)*, and 1958; Hans Hofmann and Franz Kline* in 1952; Mark Rothko in 1952* and 1959; de Kooning in 1953; Clyfford Still and Mark Tobey in 1954; Baziotes in 1955; Sam Francis in 1955 and 1958*; Motherwell in 1957*; Barnett Newman in 1959. MoMA, *Painting and Sculpture in the Museum of Modern Art*, pp. 637, 640, 643.

¹² Sandler, p. 41.

¹³ Between 1960 and 1963 MoMA acquired paintings by Gottlieb, Motherwell, Ad

or soon after an artist's first solo exhibition. Abstract Expressionism's success had also encouraged the purchase of work by younger artists of the New York School.

MoMA's early exhibition policies for vanguard American art were criticized along with its purchases. Most of the collection was "hidden" in storage and rarely shown. Although the Museum principally exhibited European modernism, it also showed some interest in American vanguard art. Dorothy Miller curated exhibitions of young American artists every few years. These shows were meant to give substantial attention to a limited number of artists, in contrast to the Whitney Museum's broad annual surveys.¹⁴ Miller's choices closely followed new trends: a number of the painters featured in "Fifteen Americans" in 1952 were Abstract Expressionists, and "Twelve Americans" in 1956 already introduced some younger New York painters.¹⁵

Reinhardt, and truly vanguard works by Helen Frankenthaler, Grace Hartigan, Morris Louis, Joseph Albers, Lucas Samaras, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Indiana, Andy Warhol, Marisol, Larry Poons, and Tom Wesselmann. MoMA, *Painting and Sculpture in the Museum of Modern Art*, p. 643.

¹⁴ Dorothy Miller's foreword to the "Fifteen Americans" catalog makes this intention clear. Museum of Modern Art. *Fifteen Americans*, ed. Dorothy C. Miller (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1952). Shows include: "Americans 1942: Eighteen Artists from Nine States"; "Fourteen Americans," 1946; "Fifteen Americans," 1952; "Twelve Americans," 1956; "Sixteen Americans," 1959.

¹⁵ "Fifteen Americans" included Baziotes, Edward Corbett, Edwin Dickinson, Herbert Ferber, Joseph Glasco, Herbert Katzman, Frederick Kiesler, Irving Driesberg, Richard Lippold, Pollock, Herman Rose, Rothko, Still, Bradley Walker Tomlin, and Thomas Wilfred. "Twelve Americans" included Ernest Briggs, James Brooks, Francis, Fritz Glarner, Philip Guston, Raoul Hague, Grace Hartigan, Kline, Ibram Lassaw, Seymour Lipton, José de Rivera, and Larry Rivers. John Myers of the Tibor de Nagy Gallery suggests that these shows, marked by Miller's "refined taste," greatly helped the New York school by making new artists visible and distinguishing between older and newer generations. John Bernard Myers, *Tracking the Marvelous: A Life in the New York Art World* (New York: Random House, 1983), pp. 172-173.

By the time of Pollock's retrospective in 1956, MoMA's support of the American vanguard was clear, but if there were any lingering doubts "The New American Painting" exhibition in 1959, dispelled them.¹⁶ This exhibition of eighty-one mostly Abstract Expressionist works by seventeen painters toured eight European countries before its debut in New York.¹⁷ Throughout the 1960s, MoMA continued to show vanguard art as it was produced, reaffirming its support of artists such as Rothko, Tobey, Hofmann, and Motherwell (who were by then no longer vanguard) with retrospectives.

In addition to purchasing and exhibiting vanguard art, MoMA advised its trustees on their private collections. Since the Museum had a relatively small budget for purchasing and relied largely on gifts, this was an important strategy for increasing its collections. As Alice Goldfarb Marquis relates in her biography of Barr, "Once it became clear that gifts or bequests from collectors would become a major source of the museum's acquisitions, Barr began to guide them carefully into buying works that the museum wanted."¹⁸ Before the opening of

¹⁶ Several scholars cite Thomas Hess's 1957 editorial as evidence of continued unrest over MoMA's policy toward vanguard American art. Marquis, p. 292; Robson, p. 65. However I believe that MoMA's support was unambiguous by this time. Hess's brief essay is actually more congratulatory than incendiary. He describes the success of avant-garde American art in the past five to ten years, crediting various dealers, critics, and museums (including MoMA) for their attention. His only really derogatory comment towards the museum is, "The fact that the Museum of Modern Art finally accepted a representative work by Hans Hofmann for its collection does not mean that its collective, bureaucratic stereotypes have become flexible." This he uses to introduce the theme of the heroic struggle of the vanguard. "Editorial: Fifty-fifth Anniversary," *Artnews* 56 (Summer 1957), 27. Barr took the opportunity to defend MoMA in his essay, "The Museum of Modern Art's Record on American Artists," published in the following issue of *Artnews*. Reprinted in *Defining Modern Art*, pp. 226-229.

¹⁷ Artists included: Baziotes, Brooks, Francis, Gorky, Gottlieb, Guston, Hartigan, de Kooning, Motherwell, Newman, Pollock, Rothko, Theodoros Stamos, Still, Tomlin, and Jack Tworkov.

¹⁸ p. 254.

“Fifteen Americans” in 1952, trustees bought sixteen works in the show (some of the first purchases of Abstract Expressionism by prestigious collectors). Barr gave trustees lists of galleries to visit with suggested artists to buy, complete with what he proposed were fair prices. Sometimes he and Dorothy Miller personally shopped for the trustees, often asking dealers for a museum discount since the works would eventually be donated. What these prominent curators bought could greatly influence the art market.¹⁹

The MoMA staff cultivated relationships with important collectors. They offered advice, appraised artworks, socialized with patrons, and even helped to hang paintings in some collectors’ homes. The Museum encouraged new collectors to try modern art with a rental program in which potential buyers could borrow paintings for three months, paying ten percent of the painting’s value each month. All of these activities were performed with the hope that collectors might eventually donate their art to the Museum. In fact, MoMA included instructions and forms for making gifts and bequests in nearly all of its publications.²⁰

¹⁹ Marquis, pp. 254--312; Lynes, p. 357. Marquis provides examples of aid and advice to trustees Nelson Rockefeller, Philip Goodwin, Philip Johnson, William Burden and other prominent collectors. In the mid-1950s collector Larry Aldrich began a purchase fund for MoMA for works under \$1,000, saying that he hoped to learn from the museum’s purchases. I doubt that he meant to improve his understanding of art so much as to educate himself about which paintings might be good investments. Lynes, p. 312.

²⁰ See *Painting and Sculpture in the Museum of Modern Art*, p. 656; *Today and Tomorrow*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1960), p. 43; Annual Reports; Bulletins.

Sometimes trustees bought art for the sole purpose of donating it to the museum. Barr often asked Philip Johnson to purchase works that were refused by the acquisitions committee. When Johnson gave the works to the museum a few years later, they were always accepted. MoMA acquired Newman’s *Abraham*, Johns’s *Flag*, and other vanguard American paintings in this way. Steven W. Naifeh, *Culture Making: Money, Success, and the New York Art World* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 95; Lynes, p. 299.

Russell Lynes suggests that “There has always hung over the Museum . . . the cloud of commercial manipulation, the accusation that it was in business to support the dollar values of its trustees’ collections, that it exerted an exaggerated and unhealthy influence over the art market.”²¹ Barr, however argued differently, saying that the Museum collection was “a collaborative effort in which our trustees take an active part, buying paintings for their own immediate use but with the intention . . . of giving them to us eventually.”²² In fact, in his defense of MoMA’s policy on American artists, Barr mentioned, not only works that the Museum bought, but also trustees’ purchases “because most of them were loyally made with the Museum’s collection in mind.”²³

Once collectors purchased a MoMA-sanctioned work, they might increase its renown and value by loaning it for exhibitions. At the 1973 auction of paintings from the Scull collection, works that had been shown at prominent museums sold for an average of three times as much as comparable works that had not been lent out.²⁴ MoMA regularly held exhibitions of works owned by trustees. Items were often borrowed from other collectors as well.²⁵ Then

Often Barr would ask Nelson Rockefeller or another trustee to purchase major works that the museum could not afford. However, in most of these instances the paintings were by accepted European “Modern Old Masters” rather than vanguard American artists.

²¹ Lynes, p. 406.

²² Marquis, p. 290.

²³ “The Museum of Modern Art’s Record on American Artists,” pp. 227-228.

²⁴ Marquis, *The Art Biz: The Covert World of Collectors, Dealers, Auction Houses, Museums, and Critics* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1991), p. 181. See lists of exhibitions of works in Sotheby Parke Bernet Inc., *A Selection of Fifty Works from the Collection of Robert C. Scull* (New York: Sotheby Parke Bernet Inc., 1973), *passim*.

²⁵ For example “Works of Art Given or Promised,” 1958; “Works Given by Philip

further prestige–immortality even–could be achieved by donating art to the Museum. As Russell Belk puts it, “When the collector is also a benefactor adding to the sparse collections of a young nation, a robber baron can perhaps come to be seen as a captain of industry and patron of the arts.”²⁶ Belk refers to an earlier time, but the situation was quite similar in the mid-twentieth century. MoMA gratified donors who sought status and recognition by including their names in numerous museum publications.²⁷

Another bonus for donors was that significant tax cuts could be obtained by giving art works to museums; it was like a government subsidy for buying art. Often it was more lucrative to donate an artwork than to sell it. For example, a collector might have bought a painting in 1950 for \$1,000 that would be appraised at \$20,000 in 1960. If he or she sold the painting through a dealer or at auction it might only net \$10,000-\$15,000 after commission and fees. Then a capital gains tax would be assessed on top of that. Whereas, the collector could donate the work to a museum and receive a tax deduction for the full \$20,000. The collector could even choose to retain a “life interest,” pledging the work and taking the tax deduction in 1960, but actually keeping the painting until some

L. Goodwin,” 1958; “The James Thrall Soby Collection of Works of Art Pledged or Given to MoMA,” 1961; “The Mrs. Adele R. Levy Collection: A Memorial Exhibition,” 1961; “The Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Ben Heller,” 1961. Marquis suggests that exhibitions of works from private collections not only flattered the owners and encouraged them to bequeath the works to MoMA, but also stamped the works with a “seal of approval” that increased their value. Periodic exhibitions of works promised to the museum also helped the owners to follow through on their pledges. *Alfred H. Barr*, pp. 286-287.

²⁶ Russell W. Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 50.

²⁷ See *Painting and Sculpture in the Museum of Modern Art*, pp. v-vi, 600-603, 605, 610; Annual Reports; Bulletins. Catalogs identify lenders and donors with each reproduction and again in the check-lists that comprise the last pages.

later date (often until death), when it would be surrendered to the Museum.²⁸

MoMA encouraged collectors with the incentive of tax breaks and included tax information with the instructions for making gifts and bequests that appeared in museum publications.²⁹

The financial rewards of collecting attracted investors to the art market. Profits from tax deductions and sales both relied on significant growth in the value of paintings. As Marquis points out, “Experienced investors all, the trustees knew that when the Museum of Modern Art endorsed certain kinds of art, astronomical profits on those kinds of art were not far behind.”³⁰ There is a long history of purchasing art for investment, but the relatively low starting prices and rapid appreciation of vanguard American art made this form of investment particularly accessible in the mid-twentieth century.³¹ Additionally, art was a good hedge against the high inflation of this period. A number of how-to books for new, relatively modest collectors appeared at this time, some specifically targeting investors.³²

²⁸ This practice was unofficially declared legitimate by Harlan F. Stone, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and Chairman of the Board for the National Gallery. Artists could also take such tax deductions by donating their work to museums. (These tax laws were reformed in 1969.)

²⁹ For example, “The Museum hopes that many thousands of its members and other friends will contribute to its 30th Anniversary Fund; it will be grateful for every gift, whither large or small. . . . All contributions are, of course, deductible for income tax purposes. . . . Our government, through provisions in its tax laws, encourages gifts to museums. Contributions may be made in many forms—cash, securities, real property or insurance—with considerable tax advantage to the donor. Material on this subject may be obtained from the Office of the 30th Anniversary Committee.” *Today and Tomorrow*, p. 43. See also Annual Reports and Bulletins.

³⁰ *Alfred H. Barr*, p. 255.

³¹ For a brief history of collecting for investment, see Belk, pp. 22-53.

³² For example John Baur, *A.B.C. for Collectors of American Contemporary Art* (New

“In the history of art, as in more materialistic matters, money talks vividly. Let us not be ashamed to listen,” Barr wrote in an article which announced and justified the establishment of MoMA.³³ He then listed a number of modern artworks which had greatly increased in value and the collectors who had profited, as if such profit was a justification for a museum devoted to modern art. Indeed high prices for vanguard American art brought attention and prestige. Harold Rosenberg regrets that “an object made by hand which fetches more than five million dollars is a sacred entity in a money-venerating society and deserves to be worshipped for that reason alone,” but high prices proclaimed the success of vanguard American art and attracted further attention.³⁴

Prices for American vanguard art increased steadily throughout the entire period under consideration due to economic prosperity, inflation, and a general boom in the art market. But vanguard American art began to attract significant attention with the great swell in prices that occurred in the mid-1950s. At this time, numerous articles appeared in the mass media describing the “boom” in American vanguard art.³⁵ These reports, found in both art journals and the

York: Princeton Press, 1954); Jeffrey H. Loria (art buyer for Sears), *Collecting Original Art* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965); Richard Rush, *Art as an Investment* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1961). Rush’s book is a particularly money-minded account, using charts and graphs to track prices. Also Wraight offers tips for people wanting to play the “art game,” but with a more tongue-in-cheek humorous and insightful style. Robert Wraight, *The Art Game* (London: L. Frewing, 1965).

³³ “A New Museum,” *Vogue* (October 1929); reprinted in *Defining Modern Art*, p. 73.

³⁴ From an article in *The New Yorker* (1973); quoted in Karl Ernest Meyer, *The Art Museum: Power, Money, Ethics: A Twentieth Century Fund Report* (New York: Morrow, 1979), p. 167.

³⁵ “The Big Gamble,” *Vogue* 123 (November 1, 1954), 106-109; Eric Hodgins and Parker Lesley, “The Great International Art Market,” *Fortune Magazine* (December 1955, 118-120, 150-169; Hodgins and Lesley, “The Great International

popular press, were particularly important because dealer prices were confidential. Auctions also played a great role since the sales were public, well publicized, and regularly reported in art journals.

After Pollock's death in 1956, prices escalated dramatically. For example, Pollock's *Autumn Rhythm* rose from \$8,000 (an exorbitant price which prevented its sale) in 1955 to \$30,000 after his death. Not only did prices of Pollock's works increase, but also those of other Abstract Expressionists. For instance, a de Kooning work that could not be sold for \$5,000 in 1955 sold for \$10,000 the next year.³⁶ As soon as subsequent generations of New York School artists established reputations, their work sold at figures comparable to those of the preceding generation.³⁷

The high price tags on vanguard American art attracted both investors and prestige-seeking collectors. Expensive artwork by well-known artists could be a social status symbol. The higher the price, the more prestige and publicity to be gained. For example, Robert Scull's purchase of Rosenquist's *F-111* for a reported \$60,000, brought fantastic "appreciation and pleasure at the lavish

Art Market II," *Fortune Magazine* 52 (January 1956), 122-125, 130-136; "Boom on Canvas," *Time Magazine* April 7, 1958, p. 80; "Under the Boom," *Time Magazine* December 1, 1958, p. 66; Marvin Elkoff, "The American Painter as a Blue Chip," *Esquire* 64 (January 1965), 36-42; Richard Feigen, "Art 'Boom': Inflationary Hedge and Deflationary Refuge," *Arts Magazine* 41 (November 1966), 23-24. Some of the articles focused specifically on vanguard American art. Others included it within discussions of more established art; such inclusion seems significant also.

³⁶ Marquis, *Alfred H. Barr*, p. 297. The exact work is not identified.

³⁷ At the 1965 auction of some of Scull's collection Rauschenberg's *Express* sold for \$20,000, de Kooning's *Police Gazette*, for \$37,000, and Kline's *Initial*, for \$18,000. These figures do not show that Second Generation and Pop Art sold better than Abstract Expressionism, but that vanguard American art in general was selling well. "Pop Goes the Market," *Definitive Statements: American Art 1964-66* (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University, List Art Center, 1986), p. 57 and note 22.

consumption of money.”³⁸ Such instances attracted a number of collectors, such as Ben Heller, Scull, and Leon Kraushar, who had no previous art background, and wished to elevate their social status by collecting vanguard American art.³⁹

The combination of MoMA’s attention and high prices indicated that vanguard American art was serious and important, but there is another element that contributed to the authentication process: recognition from Europe. The acclaim (or perceived acclaim) of U.S. artists in the previous art capitals of the world was crucial to the self-assurance of the New York art market. In 1949 James Thrall Soby titled one of his art columns in *The Saturday Review of Literature*, “Does Our Art Impress Europe?” The need for cultural recognition from the Old World was so urgent, that the same journal devoted an entire issue in 1951 to the topic of “America and the Mind of Europe,” which included essays by Americans and Europeans attempting to bridge the cultural gap between the continents. All of the contributors felt that America must show strength in the cultural sphere (complementing military and economic success) in order to win European sympathies and the war against Communism.⁴⁰

The State Department had organized a show of over one hundred recent American paintings to tour Europe in 1946, but it was halted by protests led by

³⁸Sophy Burnham, *The Art Crowd* (New York: D. McKay Co., 1973), p. 39. The \$60,000 price tag was reported in “You Bought It Now You Live with It,” *Life Magazine* July 16, 1965, p. 59. The actual price was \$45,000. Burnham, p. 40; Marquis, *The Art Biz*, p. 187.

³⁹ Many of these new collectors chose vanguard art because they could not afford more established art, so the right price was a delicate issue: high enough to attract attention, but low enough to be affordable.

⁴⁰ James Thrall Soby, “Does Our Art Impress Europe?” *Saturday Review of Literature* August 6, 1949, pp. 142-49. His answer was that Europe had not yet had much opportunity to see American art and be impressed, and he called for more government support of the arts. The essays included in the “America and the Mind of Europe” issue were soon reprinted as a book: *Saturday Review of Literature, America and the Mind of Europe* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1951).

Congressman George A. Dondero, who believed abstract art was communistic. Despite the 1950 statement signed by MoMA, the Boston Institute of Contemporary Art, and the Whitney Museum of American Art which defended modern art and freedom of expression, similar protests interfered with United States Information Agency (USIA) exhibitions in the 1950s. After two exhibitions were interrupted in 1956, USIA abandoned these efforts; the same year MoMA expanded its international program.⁴¹ Already by this time, MoMA had sent numerous exhibitions abroad,⁴² but the largest presentation of vanguard American art was “The New American Painting” in 1958-1959, supposedly assembled at the request of European museums interested in Abstract Expressionism.⁴³

When “The New American Painting” was shown in New York in 1959, it was presented like the victory lap of a triumphant runner. The catalog began with eight pages of reviews written by European critics. Not all of the comments reprinted were favorable, but hostile remarks were given much less space and seem ridiculously reactionary when surrounded by the compliments. New York painting was lauded from such former art capitals as Paris, Milan, London,

⁴¹ Eva Cockcroft, “Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War,” *Artforum* 15 (June 1974); reprinted in *Art in Modern Culture: An Anthology of Texts*, eds. Francis Frascina and Jonathan Harris, (London: Phaidon Press Ltd, 1992), p. 87.

⁴² For example, “Fifty Years of Art in the United States: Collections of the Museum of Modern Art de New York” (1955), a broad survey which included twenty Abstract Expressionist works, was shown in Paris, Zurich, Frankfurt, Barcelona, London, The Hague, Vienna, and Belgrade. In 1954 MoMA Director René d’Harnoncourt boasted shows in thirty-nine foreign countries. Lynes, p. 351.

⁴³ d’Harnoncourt, foreword to *The New American Painting: As Shown in Eight European Countries, 1958-1959* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959).

Berlin, Zurich, Rotterdam, and Barcelona. Surely this European acclaim increased America's confidence in its vanguard art.⁴⁴

While European reviewers could legitimize American vanguard art, American critics did not seem to influence the market much. Although Greenberg's prolific support, evident since the 1940s, may have been important to a small, elite circle of readers, it is unlikely that most collectors read his articles in such highbrow journals as *Partisan Review*. Critics for major newspapers, like John Canaday of *The New York Times* and Emily Genauer of *The Herald Tribune* were more likely to reach a larger public, but they were generally hostile to vanguard art.⁴⁵

Unlike the scientific experts who were so revered and consulted in the United States during the postwar era, authorities on modern art were not highly esteemed. A 1973 New York State poll about the most admirable professions ranked that of artist near the top of the list, but the occupation of critic at the bottom.⁴⁶ *Life* exhibited this negative opinion of art critics twenty-four years earlier. Returning to the 1949 Jackson Pollock article, it is clear that *Life* did not respect critics or their opinions. The statement that "a formidably high-brow

⁴⁴ By 1959 Abstract Expressionism (the dominant style in "The New American Painting") was no longer really vanguard. However the legitimation of new painting relied partly on the acceptance of its predecessors. Acclaim for Abstract Expressionism could be projected onto all New York School painting.

Other factors influencing European acceptance include MoMA's control of the American Pavilion at the Venice Biennale from 1954 to 1962 and exhibitions of vanguard American art at the Sonnabend Gallery in Paris (discussed further in Chapter 3). The huge collections of vanguard American art amassed by Italian Count Giuseppe Panza de Biumo and German Peter Ludwig also proclaimed America's success, as did the awarding of the Venice Biennale prize to Rauschenberg in 1964.

⁴⁵ Dore Ashton wrote highly sympathetic, if somewhat dense, reviews for the *New York Times* for several years in the 1950s. Interestingly, she was fired by Canaday. For details of their confrontation, see Burnham, pp. 109-119.

⁴⁶ Naifeh, p. 23.

New York critic” supported Pollock may not seem particularly scathing, but these words must be glossed in reference to another article, published four months earlier.⁴⁷ The April article, titled “High-brow, Low-brow, Middle-brow,” summarized Russell Lynes’s essay of the same title that appeared in *Harper’s*.⁴⁸ *Life* described Lynes’s highbrow man scornfully: “A cultural snob of the worst sort, he cherishes obscure trends in thought and art and fights to keep them pure, noncommercial and within his own limited circle—especially out of the hands of the hated middle-brows, whom he considers culturemongers.”⁴⁹ Doubtless, some readers recalled this contemptuous description as they read the words, “a formidably high-brow New York art critic,” and understood the sarcasm used. *Life* marketed itself to a lower-middlebrow audience who would have dismissed the opinions of the critic who supported Pollock.⁵⁰

So it seems that art critics did not influence the opinions of the lower-middlebrow public. Traditionally *Life* readers were not the people who bought vanguard art, but increasingly during the 1950s new collectors came from middlebrow backgrounds. Lynes argued that class no longer determined taste; affluent art-buyers did not necessarily embody highbrow preferences.⁵¹

⁴⁷ “Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?” p. 42.

⁴⁸ “High-brow, Low-brow, Middle-brow,” *Life Magazine* April 11, 1949, pp. 99-102. Lynes, “Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow.” *Harper's Magazine* 198 (1949), 19-28.

⁴⁹ “High-brow, Low-brow, Middle-brow,” 99. *Life* also mocked art critics, particularly vanguard critics, in “A *Life* Round Table on Modern Art,” *Life Magazine* October 11, 1948, pp. 56-79.

⁵⁰ *Life’s* lower middle-brow tendencies are obvious when one looks at the chart of high-brow, upper middle-brow, lower middle-brow, and low-brow tastes that accompanies the article. The lower middle-brow items shown—bourbon, short-sleeve sports shirts, processed food products, mass magazines themselves—match the advertisements that fill *Life’s* pages.

⁵¹ Lynes, “Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow,” p. 19

Moreover, *Life* readers—even if most did not buy art—were significant to the fame of vanguard art, and fame greatly influenced collectors. Most patrons of the arts were upper-middlebrow, according to Lynes, but their taste was generally conservative—they were the MoMA trustees who amassed only small amounts of vanguard art. Upper-middlebrow audiences were likely to read *Time*, *Harper's*, or the *New Yorker*.⁵² These magazines tended to include informational reports on art trends and occasional essays by well known critics like Rosenberg, but none of the esoteric criticism that Greenberg wrote.

Fame was more useful to the culture industry than critical acclaim. Perhaps as mainstream audiences were increasingly exposed to modern art in the mass media, many critics—in true highbrow fashion—felt the need to create an elitist aura around the art they supported. In 1965, Robert Wraight (an art critic himself) complained that most critics were purposely unintelligible in order to exclude uninitiated readers.⁵³ This technique may have diminished their audience and influence, but did not much affect the decisions of collectors; a clear example of Greenberg's lack of influence on the art market is the rapid ascent of Pop Art despite his strong disapproval. Critical support was not necessary for sales. If a critic complimented an artist, then a dealer might use the endorsement, but if a review was negative, critics could be dismissed and ignored. Art dealers and collectors themselves became prominent proponents of the art that was financially important to them.

⁵² Lynes, "Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow," pp. 26-27.

⁵³ Wraight, pp. 166-170. He quotes a few unnamed critics' reviews of the 1956 Tate Gallery exhibition of new American painting. For example, "In the end they are reabsorbed into the incommensurability and into the indefinite opening of the void of the cycle of external relations which ordain among themselves in the expanse of the surroundings." p. 167.

CHAPTER 3 CULTIVATION: MERCHANTS AND MARKETING

Prominent galleries and collectors conferred a kind of authentication, similar to that of museums, upon their artists. As Andy Warhol explains:

To be successful as an artist, you have to have your work shown in a good gallery. . . . It's a matter of marketing. . . . [A collector] wants to buy something that's going to go up and up in value, and the only way that can happen is with a good gallery, one that looks out for the artist, promotes him, and sees to it that his work is shown in the right way to the right people. Because if the artist were to fade away, so would this guy's investment. . . . So you need a good gallery so the "ruling class" will notice you and spread enough confidence in your future so collectors will buy you.¹

Dealers marketed their artists to the "right" collectors, and, as Warhol points out, continued promotion to guarantee the investment. Leo Castelli said, "Frankly, this accusation that is leveled against the dealer that they are responsible for shaping the art market is a very silly one. Naturally, we are there to do that job, and we are doing it."² This system of vanguard American art galleries and collectors was new to the postwar art market.

Before World War II, American collectors of modern art primarily bought European painting. During the war Peggy Guggenheim did much to show vanguard American art as equal to the European modern masters in her Art of This Century gallery. Robert Motherwell described the space thus:

¹Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *POPism: The Warhol '60s* [1980] (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), pp. 20-21.

² *Painters Painting: A Candid History of the Modern Art Scene, 1940-1970*, eds. Emile de Antonio and Mitch Tuchman (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984), p. 108.

“It was a U-shaped gallery. As you entered the first leg of the U, so to speak, that side contained her permanent collection of modern, abstract art, Cubist works, Mondrians, Mirós, one of the most beautiful white Picassos of the 1930s that I’ve ever seen. The center of the U was given to whatever the current exhibition was. In the other side of the U was a tunnel, quite dark, designed by Kiesler, that contained her permanent collection of Surrealist paintings. Anybody who showed in the center of the U was surrounded by some of the most beautiful works of the twentieth century.”³

Guggenheim showed contemporary American art right beside European modern masters, symbolically equating them. Guggenheim’s gallery, however, was almost like a museum—she rarely sold anything—and Guggenheim herself was a collector more than a dealer. She spent large amounts of her own money building the gallery and buying art. She preferred to socialize with the artists rather than to promote their work. Also like a collector, Guggenheim received much advice from her friend and private dealer Howard Putzel.⁴ Nevertheless, many Abstract Expressionists, including Hans Hofmann, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Robert Motherwell, and William Bazotes, participated in group and solo exhibitions at Art of This Century, providing them with some exposure if not sales.⁵

When the war ended, Guggenheim and many of the artist exiles returned to Europe, and the situation began to change. Many of Guggenheim’s artists went to Betty Parsons’s new gallery in 1946. Parsons, an artist herself, fostered a casual atmosphere that made her gallery a hangout for vanguard artists.

³ *Painters Painting*, pp. 61-62.

⁴ For a discussion of Putzel’s influence see Melvin P. Lader, “Howard Putzel: Proponent of Surrealism and Early Abstract Expressionism in America,” *Arts Magazine* 56 (March 1982), 85-96.

⁵ Guggenheim had a unique arrangement with Pollock in which she paid him a monthly stipend in return for his annual production minus one painting. A. Deirdre Robson, *Prestige, Profit, and Pleasure: The Market for Modern Art in New York in the 1940s and 1950s* (New York: Garland Pub., 1995), p. 120.

Clement Greenberg explained, “I have seldom been able to bring her gallery into focus as part of the commercial apparatus of art . . . rather I think of it as belonging more to the studio and production side of art.”⁶ However Parsons did solicit sales: “It wasn’t easy to get collectors to come around,” she said in retrospect, “but soon there were the first few converts” (among whom were Alfred Barr and Dorothy Miller).⁷

Most of the artists from *Art of This Century* who did not proceed to Parsons went to Sam Kootz. Kootz’s gallery was more prosperous than Parsons. While Parsons only sold on consignment (taking one-third of the price as commission), in the 1940s Kootz offered contracts which included monthly stipends in return for a minimum number of works per year. Kootz also paid exhibition expenses that Parsons could not afford and printed highly literate catalogs.⁸ Beginning in 1949 Kootz attempted to show his artists as a unified group, encouraging the image of a new art movement, but he could not keep this group together for long.

Throughout the 1950s, Sidney Janis gathered most of the prominent Abstract Expressionists. The migration began in 1951, when Pollock, Rothko, Barnett Newman, and Clyfford Still asked Parsons to drop her other artists and devote her full attention to them.⁹ She declined, and Pollock moved to Sidney Janis in 1952. De Kooning left Charles Egan’s gallery for Janis’s the same year.

⁶ Marcia H. Bystryn, “Art Galleries as Gatekeepers: The Case of the Abstract Expressionists,” *Social Research* 45 (1978), p. 397; quotation, p. 399.

⁷ *The Art Dealers: The Powers Behind the Scene Tell How the Art World Really Works*, eds. Alan Jones and Laura de Coppet (New York: C.N. Potter, 1984), p. 25.

⁸ Robson, pp. 102, 119; Alice Goldfarb Marquis, *The Art Biz: The Covert World of Collectors, Dealers, Auction Houses, Museums, and Critics* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1991), p. 235.

⁹ Calvin Tomkins, “A Keeper of the Treasure,” *New Yorker* 51 (June 9, 1975), 46.

Other artists soon followed these two giants, trickling in throughout the decade.¹⁰ Janis was a more prosperous dealer who actively marketed his artists, and sales of vanguard American art increased. When the Abstract Expressionists joined Janis in the 1950s it was already a renowned gallery, and the vogue for their art in the second half of the decade further increased its reputation. By the early 1960s, Janis could confer the “same stamp of automatic approval” that a museum purchase indicated.¹¹ Indeed, according to Harold Rosenberg, Pop Art’s success in 1962 was largely due to the fact that Janis had taken on several of the Pop artists.¹²

The most notable and notorious postwar dealer was Leo Castelli. He offered his artists the security of regular stipends and a publicity machine that soon extended across America and to Europe.¹³ From its inception in 1957, Castelli’s gallery grew rapidly to include such stars as Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Frank Stella, Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, and James Rosenquist. In the thick of the vanguard art boom, many of these second generation New York artists—unlike their Abstract Expressionist predecessors—experienced success with their first solo gallery exhibitions. The most extreme example was Johns’s 1958 debut at Castelli. Collector Robert Scull

¹⁰ Incidentally, Leo Castelli takes credit for bringing Pollock and de Kooning to Janis. (He did not yet have his own gallery at that time.) *The Art Dealers*, p. 86. Rothko moved to Janis in 1955, Kline, in 1956, Guston, in 1956, Motherwell, in 1957, and Baziotes, in 1959. Gorky’s estate was also handled by Janis beginning in 1953. Robson, pp. 96-97. Janis immediately increased the prices of these artists’ work. See Chapter One, note 15.

¹¹ Cleve Gray, “The Gallery, the Museum, and the Critic,” *Art in America* 50 (Summer 1962), 91.

¹² “The Art Establishment,” *Esquire* 64 (January 1965), 43. Janis signed on Wesselmann, Segal, Dine, and Oldenburg after his first Pop exhibition, “New Realists” in 1961.

¹³ Robson, p. 101.

wanted to buy the whole show, but Castelli would not allow him to be so “vulgar.” Alfred Barr bought three paintings for the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), and asked Philip Johnson to buy a fourth. Additionally Barr and Dorothy Miller each bought small paintings for themselves, as did Ben Heller, Emily Tremaine, and other renowned collectors.¹⁴ Also important between 1960 and 1965 was the Green Gallery, financed by the collector Robert Scull and managed by Richard Bellamy.

Dealers like Parsons, who represented only unestablished Americans, had little financial security and could not afford to give their artists stipends, cash advances, or much publicity.¹⁵ Most dealers who sold vanguard American art integrated it with European painting. Kootz received regular shipments of Picassos from Paris along with other European art. Janis sold contemporary School of Paris paintings. Even Castelli sold European art during his first season in order to attract collectors.¹⁶ This practice encouraged collectors who entered the galleries seeking European art to look at the new Americans as well. It also assured the dealers of some significant sales while vanguard American art was still gaining acceptance, thereby providing them with money to support their American artists, to pay exhibition expenses, and to publish high quality catalogs.¹⁷

A prominent dealer could help an artist become fashionable—“go to openings, talk to the right people, murmur the right things, get his name in the

¹⁴ *Painters Painting*, p. 106; Tomkins, *Off the Wall: Robert Rauschenberg and the Art World of Our Time* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1980), pp. 143-144.

¹⁵ *The Art Dealers*, p. 86.

¹⁶ Robson, p. 97.

¹⁷ Robson, p. 119.

right magazines.”¹⁸ Deirdre Robson calls such dealers, including Janis and Castelli, “audience–rather than artist–oriented.”¹⁹ Unlike the artist scene at Parsons, Castelli’s gallery became a hangout for critics, journalists, and enthusiasts—with a few artists in the mix.²⁰ Such an environment was highly conducive to fame. Audience-oriented dealers held lavish openings. Their exhibitions were well hung and lighted, often showing works more flatteringly than a museum might. These dealers closely watched their artists’ market, buying work at auctions to keep prices up if necessary. To encourage reluctant collectors, galleries sometimes agreed to buy a painting back in a few years at a higher price to guarantee the investment value.²¹ Not only did they introduce their artists to important collectors, but also other helpful people in the art scene, such as architects who might use their work.²²

As Robson points out, Janis, Kootz, and Castelli—contrary to generations of dealers before them—all had careers in business before they became art dealers.²³ This gave them a background in advertising and promotion that other dealers may have lacked. Castelli said, “I don’t decide what art is. My responsibility is

¹⁸ Sophy Burnham’s interpretation of how an artist becomes fashionable. *The Art Crowd* (New York: D. McKay Co., 1973), p. 43.

¹⁹ p. 93.

²⁰ Marquis, pp. 222-223. The significance of an “audience-oriented dealer” is clear when one examines the market for artists who remained with Parsons. Ad Reinhart’s paintings were only selling for \$750-\$2,000 in 1960 while his peers at Janis commanded \$5,000-\$15,000. Robson, pp. 250-251.

²¹ John Russell Taylor and Brian Brooke, *The Art Dealers* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 260.

²² Kootz was known to have done this. Doris Brian, “Dealers Help Artists Help Themselves,” *Art Digest* 25 (October 1, 1950), 11; Robson, p. 101.

²³ p. 94.

the myth-making.²⁴ He made his artists into myths through promotion. Dealers sent out press releases, bulletins on artists' latest activities, and invitations to the exhibition openings. They also printed brochures and catalogs, which included reproductions of the artwork. Occasionally they purchased advertisements in art journals.²⁵ Sometimes, unbeknownst to the writers, dealers subsidized reviews or articles focusing on work by their artists.²⁶ They nearly always supplied reproductions, even if a review was unfavorable.²⁷ In this way dealers cultivated an audience of collectors and viewers.

Castelli extended the promotion of his artists beyond New York. He formed collaborative relationships with galleries across America. Castelli also helped to gain European critical acclaim for American art with shows in Paris. Kootz had sent a rather unsuccessful show to Paris in 1947 and Janis sent two in 1951-1952, but it was not until Castelli formed an agreement with the Sonnabend Gallery in Paris (run by his ex-wife) in 1962 that American art could be seen regularly in Europe. According to Castelli, this exposure in Europe facilitated Rauschenberg's grand prize award at the 1964 Venice Biennale: "As a result, by

²⁴ Burnham, p. 133.

²⁵ Castelli claimed that he bought ads more to support needy magazines than for publicity. Burnham, p. 44. In my own informal analysis of *Artnews* and *Art in America*, the two most important art journals in the 1950s and 1960s, I was surprised at the small number vanguard advertisements I found. In the Fifties there are occasional, small ads for Parsons, Kootz, Egan, Janis and others near the back of the magazines, however these are insignificant compared to the large promotions for traditional galleries like Knoedler and Duveen that are prominently placed near the front cover. Even in the mid-Sixties, when Janis and Castelli were realizing substantial profits, they placed few ads in these journals. *Arts Magazine* (called *Art Digest* before 1955) and *Artforum* (inaugurated in 1962) show similar patterns.

²⁶ Burnham relates an instance in which Castelli did this for an article by Leo Steinberg about Johns. pp. 133-135.

²⁷ Marquis, p. 222.

1964 my young artists were much better known abroad than any of the older generation Abstract Expressionists.”²⁸

Despite their dependence on arbiters of taste, many collectors saw themselves as vanguard tastemakers. Ben Heller explained, “When a painting or sculpture hits me, it hits me in the stomach or the back of my neck and if I sing in those places and get the proper resonance then I know that I’m in the presence of a great work, as it were, for me.”²⁹ Heller was an avid collector of Abstract Expressionism, but apparently he received no biofeedback from these paintings until the mid-1950s when they became in vogue.³⁰ Vanguard collectors are often presented as pioneers with a sort of manifest destiny in art. Richard Brown Baker said, “I leave the established artists to others. My principal joy in collecting lies in the discovery of new, unrecognized talents. It gives me great satisfaction to watch unknown, young artists grow and develop.”³¹ Robert Scull is referred to as someone who “likes to ride on [the] perimeter [of the acceptable]. He has an appetite for shock, washed away at times by a love for the quiet, the

²⁸ *The Art Dealers*, p. 98; Burnham, pp. 45-46. According to others, Castelli lobbied the judges to secure the prize for his artist. For a critical discussion of the politics involved, see Laurie J. Monahan, “Cultural Cartography: American Designs at the 1964 Venice Biennale,” *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal, 1945-1964*, ed. Serge Guilbaut (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 369-416. Perhaps British critic Richard Wraight’s 1965 statement that Europeans were “suspicious of the way in which art is promoted in the United States” is related to this event. *The Art Game* (London: L. Frewing, 1965), p. 63.

Janis was not interested in showing Abstract Expressionism abroad since it sold easily in New York. The two shows that he sent to Paris were at the request of French galleries. Marquis, p. 244; Robson, p. 99.

²⁹ Marquis, p. 210.

³⁰ B. H. Friedman, “The New Collector: Three Typical Collections,” *Art in America* 46 (Summer 1958), 14.

³¹ John Rublowsky, *Pop Art, Photo*. Ken Heyman (New York: Basic Books, 1965), p. 156.

subtle.”³² However, collectors were rarely the trailblazing explorers or unselfish missionaries that they purported themselves to be. As Larry Poons explains, “Robert Scull never walked up to me and said, ‘. . . I want to help you.’ He did it through Dick Bellamy, and it was a dealer, and it was business.”³³ Scull was the first to buy works by several now famous artists before they became popular; he is known for “discovering” artists by visiting their studios, but a more likely story is that Bellamy introduced him to these artists and escorted him to their studios.³⁴

Regardless of how collectors were introduced to vanguard art, once they acquired a reputation as important patrons, they could confer prestige and publicity with their purchases; as Sophie Burnham notes, “It is worth something to the artist to be seen on the right living room walls.”³⁵ Janis was particularly influential in placing his artists in the “right” living rooms, because he knew many prominent collectors of modern art from his experience as a trustee for MoMA in the 1940s. Harry Abrams suggests that galleries publicized purchases by renowned collectors (such as himself) to “reinforce their own judgment, so to speak.”³⁶ Indeed, many galleries enjoyed the loyal patronage of a group of important collectors and often offered discounts to such regular clients.³⁷

³² Allene Talmey, “Art is the Core,” *Vogue* 144 (July 1964), 125.

³³ *Painters Painting*, p. 113.

³⁴ Scull was the first to buy works by Rosenquist, Larry Poons, Robert Morris, John Chamberlain, and Mark di Suvero, all of whom were introduced by Bellamy between 1960 and 1965. Marquis, p. 186.

³⁵ Burnham, p. 131.

³⁶ Bruce Kurtz, “An Interview with Harry N. Abrams,” *Arts Magazine* 47 (September 1972), 49.

³⁷ Burnham, p. 39.

A motivating factor for buyers of vanguard American art was the low cost. Most vanguard collectors were lower-middlebrow or lowbrow *nouveau riche* industrialists attempting to raise their social status.³⁸ When they began collecting, most could not afford the Old Masters or Modern Old Masters that traditional art patrons like the Rockefellers preferred. Even those newly wealthy collectors who had the capital to buy expensive art often tended towards thrift. Heller, Scull, Larry Aldrich, and others were known for haggling with dealers.³⁹ Sometimes such collectors would buy works directly from artists' studios in

³⁸ Some notable vanguard collectors in the Fifties and Sixties: Joseph Hirshorn (mining), Roy Neuberger (stockbroker), Walter Bareiss (textile import-export), Ben Heller (textile manufacturer), Larry Aldrich (clothing designer), Burton and Emily Tremaine (Miller Company), Albert and Vera List, Robert and Ethel Scull (taxicabs and insurance), Harry Abrams (publisher), Leon Kraushar (insurance broker), Peter Ludwig (German; candy), Count Guiseppe Panza di Buomo (Italian; industrialist). There are a few exceptions to the *nouveau riche* stereotype: Richard Brown Baker (private income), Philip Johnson (architect), Alfonso Ossorio (artist with private income). Major, prestigious collectors (mostly trustees of MoMA) like the Rockefellers, Lee Ault, and William A. M. Burden bought some vanguard art also, but it made up only a fragment of their large collections.

³⁹ Marquis, pp. 154, 186. Dealer John B. Myers of the Tibor de Nagy gallery relates Robert Scull's 1959 visit:

A man came into the gallery to see the work of a new artist named Robert Humphrey, who is an advocate of monochlor paintings. . . . I showed the gentleman one lovely small work about fourteen-by-twenty inches and told him, upon being asked, that the price was \$125. The man said he wouldn't pay that much; would the artist reconsider the price. I said I would ask Ralph Humphrey, which I did. . . . A few days later the man returned. . . . "Have you spoken to the artist?" he wanted to know. "Yes, I have," I replied. Before I could say anything more, he said, "Good, I will pay you twenty-five dollars."

This is the only time I've asked a client to leave the gallery and not come back."

Tracking the Marvelous: A Life in the New York Art World (New York: Random House, 1983), pp. 216-217.

order to negotiate bargains. While their interest in vanguard art tended towards the highbrow, such collectors' financial attitudes were still lower-middlebrow.⁴⁰

These collectors used their art to gain admission to a society that otherwise would have been inaccessible to them. Scull explained:

I involve myself four to five nights a week and maybe thirty-five weekends out of the year in doing nothing but getting down to studios, involving myself with artists and even artists who haven't really made it yet but just are at the beginning of their careers, so you've got to jog them along. . . . And then you get these wild phone calls at one in the morning: "I'm being dispossessed"; or someone needs an abortion; or someone's having a baby; or someone needs this, or that; and, you know, that's part of your involvement with the whole thing.⁴¹

Scull thought of himself as a patron, not just a collector, because of his involvement in artists' lives. He portrayed himself as a disinterested promoter of "justice, humanity, and peace" who just happened to acquire artwork and make money in the process.⁴² Early on he stopped buying from artists whom he felt

⁴⁰ Most vanguard collectors were not financially able to purchase established art. A painting by an "undiscovered" contemporary artist cost from about two hundred to two thousand dollars—compared to the \$200,000+ price of an Old Master, Renoir, or early Picasso. Yet even modest purchases, if publicized, could mean entrance into the art world and introductions to the upper echelons of society.

Cécile Whiting argues that Pop collectors, such as Robert Scull, deliberately posited themselves against the serious connoisseurship that she claims Abstract Expressionist collectors like Heller embodied, that Pop collectors presented themselves as an alternative to both conventional suburban taste and older collectors. *A Taste for Pop: Pop Art, Gender, and Consumer Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 97-98. However Scull actually owned more Abstract Expressionism than Pop. Allene Talmey, "Art is the Core," *Vogue* 144 (July 1964), 123; "At Home With Henry," *Time Magazine* February 21, 1964, p. 71. Heller was actually quite similar to the "Pop collectors" that Whiting describes. Heller and Scull were both canny businessmen who collected art for display in their homes, social status, and investment value.

⁴¹ *Painters Painting*, p. 111.

⁴² Gregoire Muller, "Points of View: A Taped Conversation with Robert C. Scull," *Arts Magazine* 45 (November 1970), 38.

“didn’t need me.”⁴³ He relished the power derived from his (perceived or actual) role as benefactor.

Scull admitted that one of the reasons he purchased art was for “social climbing.”⁴⁴ He enjoyed his reputation as a collector, saying, “. . . Don’t think I don’t like all the attention. I love it.”⁴⁵ The Sculls’ clearly wished to elevate their social status through their art collection. Servants, conspicuous in photographs and descriptions of their home, helped to establish class distinctions.⁴⁶ In 1964 Tom Wolfe launched a flood of mass media attention with a humorous essay describing the Sculls’ ascent. He dubbed them “the folk heroes of every social climber who ever hit New York,” but suggested that, despite a few mishaps, the Sculls had reached “the top of the ladder” and were enjoying their position.⁴⁷

The mishaps on the way up are telling. Although Prince Michael of Greece and Robert Scull were on a first name basis soon after meeting at a party,⁴⁸ art world luminaries such as Alfred Barr snubbed the couple. Richard Brown Baker describes a dinner party which he suspects was contrived so that Barr would see their collection. Barr, however, was absent with the excuse of

⁴³ Jane Kramer, “Profiles: Man Who Is Happening Now,” *New Yorker* November 26, 1966, p. 87.

⁴⁴ Muller, p. 39.

⁴⁵ “You Bought It Now You Live with It,” *Life Magazine* July 16, 1965, p. 57.

⁴⁶ Baker describes “negro menservants and a maid” serving dinner at a party he attended at the Sculls’ home. “My Dinner with Jasper Johns (and Robert Rauschenberg, Leo Castelli, Robert Scull, Ethel Scull, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline and Lots More) – A Journal,” *Paris Review* 143 (Summer 1997), p. 218.

⁴⁷ The essay originally appeared as “Upward with the Arts” in *New York*, the Sunday magazine section of the *World Journal Tribune*; reprinted as “Bob and Spike” in *The Pump House Gang* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1968), pp. 173-203. Quotations, pp. 179, 181.

⁴⁸ Kramer, p. 78.

bird-watching that weekend.⁴⁹ Wolfe tells how Liza Parkinson, then President of the Museum of Modern Art, was more interested in Ethel Scull's hair than in her art collection.⁵⁰

The Sculls reputedly hired a public relations firm to help promote and shape their image.⁵¹ New vanguard art indicated something about collectors. This was the Sculls' ticket into society: they had the New. The couple appeared modern or, in 1960s language, "hip," and even their social superiors were interested. As Wolfe related, vanguard collecting was "tricky business": the collector must buy "the latest, the most avant-garde, the most wacked-out in painting . . . and, preferably, [be] publicized for purchasing it. One has... *the new Lichtenstein! the new Poons! the new Rauschenberg! the new Dine! the new Oldenburg!*"⁵² To obtain the necessary publicity, upwardly mobile collectors aggressively pursued media coverage. Additionally, like the rest of the middlebrow public, such collectors often learned of vanguard art in the press. The mass media became crucial to the vanguard art market.

⁴⁹ Baker, p. 214.

⁵⁰ pp. 174-179.

⁵¹ Burnham, p. 40; Marquis, p. 174. Marquis insinuates that many of the "facts" known about the Sculls actually may have been fabricated by the PR firm. This likely explains the frequent mentions of the Sculls in the press; there is much more information about them available than about contemporary vanguard collectors. Personal publicity also increased the value of their art.

Collectors who acquired social status through their careers or ancestry were less interested in publicity. Abrams, the renowned publisher, said that he attempted to be inconspicuous so as not to artificially influence the art market. Kurtz, p. 49. Richard Brown Baker, who inherited a private income, was a relatively unknown collector. He never sold any of his art at auction, instead bequeathing his collection to Yale University (the Sculls auctioned work in 1965, 1970, 1973), and even some art world insiders did never heard of him. Baker, p. 221.

⁵² p. 189.

CHAPTER 4 DISSEMINATION: MASS MEDIA MYTH-MAKING

Thomas Hess said, “I don’t really know why art suddenly became a possible thing for an upper-middle-class man or woman to buy. I think that it has something to do with the media: news, magazines, and television.”¹ Some scholars argue that the mass media did not take an interest in contemporary modern art until Pop,² but certainly the trend began with articles about Jackson Pollock and other Abstract Expressionists in the late 1940s. Indeed, while Pop artists like Warhol may have purposely courted the media, Abstract Expressionists did not eschew attention. Pop artists may have learned something about promotion from commercial art, but they could have learned just as much from the effect that media coverage had on Abstract Expressionism.³

One contributor to the success of vanguard art is that “the element of outrage attracts publicity, and publicity attracts buyers.”⁴ Certainly this outrage did attract attention, especially in early reports which questioned whether vanguard art might be a “hoax.” More serious accounts disseminated

¹ *Painters Painting: A Candid History of the Modern Art Scene, 1940-1970*, eds. Emile de Antonio and Mitch Tuchman (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984), p. 106.

² For example Jennifer Wells, “Pop Goes the Market,” *Definitive Statements: American Art 1964-66* (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University, List Art Center, 1986), p. 56.

³ Christin Mamiya suggests that Pop artists learned about marketing and advertising from jobs in commercial art. *Pop Art and Consumer Culture: American Super Market*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), p. 134

⁴ Taylor, John Russell and Brian Brooke, *The Art Dealers* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 261. They use Warhol’s soup cans as an example.

information about the activities discussed in the previous chapters. As we have already seen with the 1949 *Life* article about Jackson Pollock, the mass media summarized the achievements of vanguard art in American institutions, New York galleries, and the European art world. Additionally, reviews of museum and gallery exhibitions brought art to a vast public that rarely attended the exhibitions themselves. Reports on art investments and record-breaking sales at auctions, lent vanguard American art the aura that accompanies dollar signs.⁵

Perhaps most popular were the entertaining details revealed about the lives of celebrity artists and collectors. In addition to an increase in attention from art journals as Abstract Expressionism gained acceptance, mass publications like *Life*, *Time*, and *Vogue* became increasingly interested in notable artists. This interest began in the 1940s and grew throughout the Fifties, particularly with articles about Jackson Pollock; if Warhol was the “most famous American artist,” Pollock was the runner-up.⁶

The mass media increased the fame of certain artists by introducing their work and/or personalities to the larger “public,” but media coverage also could influence the small group of collectors who actually bought paintings. That Alfred Barr edited a two-part article for *Fortune Magazine* on “The Great

⁵ According to Wraight, media interest in auctions (in England anyway) began in 1958 when Peter Wilson became chairman at Sotheby’s and the Goldschmidt sale of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist works grossed £781,000 (over two million dollars). It seems that the press took interest in the sale due to the record prices, but Wraight suggests that Wilson henceforth encouraged publicity, knowing it would be good for business and not unwelcome to the prestige-seeking buyers. pp. 127-129.

⁶ Quotation of the title of a *Newsweek* article at Warhol’s death. Jack Kroll, March 9, 1987, 64. The huge attendance at the Pollock retrospective at MoMA last year attests to his fame. The crowd I experienced there during Christmas week, with a near two-hour wait to enter the museum and hardly room to breathe once inside, was not very different from the mob at the opening of Warhol’s 1965 show at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, except that Pollock did not appear in person as Warhol did. Mamiya, p. 140.

International Art Market” shows his understanding of the authority that the mass media could hold for collectors.⁷ *Artnews* became Abstract Expressionism’s biggest proponent in the 1950s, and *Art in America* was important in the 1960s, but Steven Naifeh suggests that most collectors did not read art journals. They might glance at the reproductions in *Artnews*—certainly covers like the January 1958 issue which featured Jasper John’s *Target with Four Faces* attracted attention—but a blurb in mass publications like *Life*, *Time*, or *The New York Times* was more useful than attention from an art journal.⁸ The magazine interviews and accounts of artists’ personal lives may have substituted for actual contact with collectors.⁹ Even trustees of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) were affected by the mass media.¹⁰

At first, most media attention was rather negative. The 1949 *Life* article about Jackson Pollock discussed in Chapter Two asked sarcastically “Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?”¹¹ However this unfavorable

⁷ Alice Goldfarb Marquis, *Alfred H. Barr, Jr.: Missionary for the Modern* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1989), pp. 294-295. Eric Hodgins and Parker Lesley, “The Great International Art Market,” *Fortune Magazine* 52 (December 1955), 118-120, 150-169. “The Great International Art Market II,” *Fortune Magazine* 53 (January 1956), 122-125, 130-136.

⁸ Sophy Burnham, *The Art Crowd* (New York: D. McKay Co., 1973), pp. 106-108; Naifeh, *Culture Making: Money, Success, and the New York Art World* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 96; Dorothy Gees Seckler, “Clues to the Future,” *Art in America* 48 (Summer 1960), 105. Thomas Hess borrowed *Target with Four Faces* from Leo Castelli just before Johns’s first solo exhibition opened. To Castelli’s apparent surprise, it showed up on the cover of *Artnews*.

⁹ Naifeh, p. 115.

¹⁰ Irving Sandler, introduction to Alfred Hamilton Barr, *Defining Modern Art: Selected Writings of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.*, eds. Irving Sandler and Amy Newman (New York: Abrams, 1986), p. 30.

¹¹ “Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?” *Life Magazine* August 8, 1949, pp. 42-43

attitude changed throughout the 1950s as the market for vanguard American art changed. A flattering story about Roy Lichtenstein, published in 1964 and entitled, “Is He the Worst Artist in the U.S.?” shows that the media had come full circle.¹²

In the 1940s the mass media devoted some attention to modern art, but it was usually presented with a sarcastic slant. Vanguard painting was called a “hoax,” something to be ridiculed.¹³ This attitude can be seen in *Life’s* 1948 “Round Table on Modern Art.” Although modern masters such as Picasso were unanimously acclaimed by the “fifteen distinguished critics and connoisseurs,” vanguard American artists like Pollock, de Kooning, Baziotes, Gottlieb, and Stamos were labeled “extremists” and heavily criticized.¹⁴ In 1949 Alfred Barr wrote a letter to *Life Magazine* director Henry Luce, defending Abstract Expressionism.¹⁵ A few months later, *Life* published “Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?” Although this article still retained the mocking tone of previous reports, it devoted substantial attention to a major vanguard artist.

The tone of mass media exposure may have been less important than the exposure itself. When in 1951, modern art antagonist Huntington Hartford bought full-page ads in several major newspapers attacking de Kooning, it was great publicity for de Kooning and for the New York School. Neither the artist

¹² Dorothy Seiberling, “Is He the Worst Artist in the U.S.?” *Life Magazine* January 31, 1964, pp. 79-83.

¹³ For a summary, see Mary Lee Corlett, “Jackson Pollock: American Culture, the Media and the Myth,” *Rutgers Art Review* 8 (1987), 80-84.

¹⁴ “A *Life* Round Table on Modern Art,” *Life Magazine* October 11, 1948, pp. 56-79.

¹⁵ Serge Guilbaut, “Postwar Painting Games,” *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal, 1945-1964*, ed. Serge Guilbaut (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), p. 35.

nor his dealer could have purchased such expensive advertisements; regardless of Hartford's intention, de Kooning's name had wide circulation that day. The same was true of the sarcastic articles about Pollock and other vanguard artists; they included reproductions and information that reached audiences impossible for dealers to address. Several prominent collectors suddenly became interested in Pollock after the *Life* article, and his next exhibition at Parsons sold more paintings than any of his previous shows. As one visitor commented, "Who wouldn't have been willing to pay a few hundred dollars to have a painting by 'that artist who was profiled in *Life*'?"¹⁶

As Bradford Collins points out, the Abstract Expressionists occupied a peculiar position in relation to the mass media: they were a counter-culture group who situated themselves contrary to the bourgeoisie, but simultaneously they needed to court that same bourgeoisie if they were to attain financial success.¹⁷ Adolph Gottlieb felt artists should be outside of society and speak to an elite rather than the general public.¹⁸ Barnett Newman held particularly

¹⁶ Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Genius*, (New York: C. N. Potter, 1989), p. 599. Some notable visitors to Pollock's November 1949 opening at Parsons include collectors Roy Neuberger, Burton Tremaine, and Edward Root, Alexey Brodovitch of *Harper's Bazaar*, Happy and Valentine Macy, and Alfred Barr. Buyers included regulars Tony Smith, Alfonso Ossorio, Ted Dragon, and the Macys plus newcomers Tremaine, Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., Dwight Ripley, Root, movie star Vincent Price, and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller. Eighteen out of twenty-seven paintings sold. A number of art critics were suddenly more respectful toward Pollock also. Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Genius*, (New York: C. N. Potter, 1989), pp. 597-599; quotation. Naifeh, pp. 597-599. Pollock sold thirty-five paintings for a total of \$13, 870 (including \$4, 578 gallery commission) that year. Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 243, note 50.

¹⁷ "Life Magazine and the Abstract Expressionists, 1948-1951: A Historiographic Study of Late Bohemian Enterprise," *Art Bulletin* 73 (June 1991), 283-308.

¹⁸ "The Artist and the Public," *Art in America* 42 (December 1954), 266-71.

radical, anti-bourgeois, anarchist political views.¹⁹ Although a number of the artists had such antisocial convictions, the Abstract Expressionists actually campaigned for publicity. Overt publicity led James Rosenquist to see the Abstract Expressionists as performers for a mass audience.²⁰ One successful effort was their protest of the Metropolitan Museum's 1950 exhibition of contemporary American art which they felt would be judged too conservatively. Eighteen artists sent a letter to the president of the Metropolitan and to the *New York Times*. They received front page coverage from the newspaper, and *Life* included a photograph of the protesters, dubbed "the Irascibles," in its review of the exhibition.²¹ Several group members felt that appearing in a mass magazine might compromise their defiant attitude, but perhaps the success that Pollock experienced after his appearance in *Life* was more persuasive.²²

Mary Lee Corlett associates Pollock's brooding, rebellious image with that of young popular culture idols such as James Dean and Marlon Brando, suggesting that this fashionable image, depicted in mass magazines, helped new audiences relate to the artist in the late 1950s.²³ Indeed, photographs of Pollock support this image, showing him casually dressed in a t-shirt and jeans, cigarette

¹⁹ See, for example, Newman's comments in *Painters Painting* pp. 71, 159.

²⁰ Dorothy Gees Seckler, "Artist in America: Victim of the Culture Boom," *Art in America* 51 (December 1963), 36.

²¹ "The Metropolitan and Modern Art," *Life Magazine* January 15, 1951, pp. 34-38.

²² Collins, pp. 297-298. The "Irascibles" did insist on an "honest" photograph, shunning their usual thrift store clothing to pose "like bankers," instead of the more personal, subjective images of Pollock.

²³ "Jackson Pollock: American Culture, the Media and the Myth," *Rutgers Art Review* 8 (1987), 94-97, 101-102.

dangling from his lips, and brow furrowed in anguish.²⁴ From the beginning in 1949, Pollock was described as “moody” and “brooding,” but this personality was seen as melodramatic or subversive throughout the 1950s.²⁵

By the end of the decade, the gloomy, rebellious youth had become an American hero, and so had Jackson Pollock. By this time Abstract Expressionism was selling tremendously, bolstered by a large group of second generation artists. Dorothy Seiberling described Pollock in 1959 as a “myth.” In addition to his “reckless, restless, brooding” personality, she emphasized his “originality, energy, and freedom,” his cowboy past, his slow, diligent ascent to self-made success, and his suburban lifestyle—in short, his *Americanness*.²⁶ Max Kozloff discusses the existential American freedom suggested by “action painting,” which allowed the United States government to use vanguard art as a Cold War weapon despite the anti-establishment defiance of many painters.²⁷ As one critic observed in 1960, “Defiance, it appears, can quickly become fashionable, at least when expressed in paintings that are abstract and not obviously political.”²⁸

Similarly Johns’s flag paintings—whether celebratory or critical—were undeniably American, as were the consumer images of Pop Art. Pop was seized by the media very soon after its debut in art galleries. Major articles began to

²⁴ For example, “Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?” pp. 42, 45; “The Champ,” *Time Magazine* December 19, 1956, p. 66; “Rebel Artist’s Tragic Ending,” *Life Magazine* August 27, 1956, p. 58; Seiberling, “Baffling U.S. Art: What It Is All About: Part I,” *Life Magazine* November 9, 1959, pp. 70, 74-75.

²⁵ “Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?” pp. 42-45. Films like *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Wild One* appeared in the mid-1950s, but they were highly controversial at the time.

²⁶ “Baffling U.S. Art,” pp. 68-80.

²⁷ “American Painting During the Cold War,” *Artnews* 13 (May 1973), 43, 46-47.

²⁸ Spencer Klaw, “The Cultural Innovators,” *Fortune Magazine* 62 (February 1960), 148.

appear in mass magazines as early as 1963.²⁹ If the public prefers art that is familiar, as Russell Belk suggests, not only did most viewers recognize the banal imagery of Pop, but they were more familiar with the art itself, due to its prominence in the media.³⁰

With such mass media attention devoted to vanguard art, artists became celebrities. As the names of stars like Pollock and Warhol became famous, their sales increased accordingly. Michel Foucault discusses the connotations of an artist's name in his 1969 essay, "What Is an Author?" The name or signature attached to a work describes it, referring to other works by the same artist and the artist's public image.³¹ When collectors purchase a painting by a certain artist, they also buy all of the connotations that the artist's name implies. With media attention a famous name implied much. Society columns reported the

²⁹ For example, Aline B. Saarinen, "Explosion of Pop Art: A New Kind of Fine Art Imposing Poetic Order on the Mass-Produced World," *Vogue* 141 (April 1963), 86-87, 134, 136, 142; "Pop Art: Cult of the Commonplace," *Time Magazine* May 3, 1963, pp. 69-72; "Is He the Worst Artist in the U.S.?"; Tomkins, "You Think This Is a Supermarket?" *Life Magazine* November 20, 1964, pp. 138-44; Gloria Steinem, "The Ins and Outs of Pop Culture," *Life Magazine* August 20, 1965, pp. 72-89.

³⁰ *Collecting in a Consumer Society* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 108.

It is interesting that Pop was not seen as a hoax. Although it was representational and contained recognizable imagery, if mass media viewers did not think "I can do that," they might have thought, "I can buy that." At least "action painting" retained the indexical trace of the artist's hand in its gesture, conferring a kind of authenticity and preciousness; the absence of such aura in Pop Art could have made it seem even more suspect than its predecessor. As Mamiya points out, Pop's shift away from the Abstract Expressionist interest in process, emphasized its commodity and therefore commonplace status. While Abstract Expressionism was marketed as highly individualistic and creative, Pop lacked the aura conferred by the marks of the artist-genius's hand. Perhaps Pop's relatively easy acceptance illustrates the advanced state of culture industry promotion of vanguard art by the 1960s.

³¹ Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" [1969] *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Donald Preziosi (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 303-305. See also Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, "Semiotics and Art History," *Art Bulletin* 73 (June 1991), 180-184.

activities of artists, art columns described their successes and failures, and feature articles shared interviews, photographs, and other privileged information. The words of mythologized artists took on a kind of aura regardless of their informational value or lack thereof. This is seen in Warhol's many "unreliable" statements; although such interviews are not considered to be trustworthy sources of information, they are to this day quoted frequently. Christin Mamiya notes that Warhol's interviews were intended to generate interest more than to disseminate information.³²

An aura of distinction—the glamour that makes stars seem special—is a celebrity's cultural capital, so while magazines sought to bring readers closer to famous personalities, the reduction of social distance also threatened to disperse this aura.³³ While articles might provide some information, they often served to make artist celebrities seem even *more* enigmatic and intriguing. Artists supported this technique, sometimes unknowingly, with statements that were often incomprehensible to readers outside of the New York art world. Warhol was a master of creating publicity without revealing any aura-diminishing information about himself. In this way mass magazines helped to broadcast aura to lower middlebrow audiences as museums did to upper middlebrow patrons.³⁴

³² pp. 138-139.

³³ Gary Gumpert discusses this delicate balance in "The Wrinkle Theory: Deconsecration of the Hero," *American Heroes in a Media Age*, eds. Susan J. Drucker and Robert S. Cathcart (Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press, 1994), p. 56.

³⁴ Richard M. Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century*, (New York: Verso, 1996), pp.244-45. Although Ohmann refers to an earlier time period, magazines and celebrities had not changed much by mid-century.

Interviews given by Pop artists have been widely quoted and have become, as Mamiya writes, "a definitive source of information" on their art. However, there are a number of interviews of Abstract Expressionists and even

Pop also appeared in advertisements styled after vanguard art, which could reinforce images of the art itself. For example, a 1964 promotion for Brazilian Coffee, depicts a melodramatic romantic comic-strip style scene. Ads resembling comics were not new, but the visible bendy dots refer to Lichtenstein instead of a cartoon.³⁵ Vanguard art was also used as backdrops in fashion layouts, such as the Pollock drip paintings used in *Vogue* in 1951 and Marisol's sculptures in *Harper's Bazaar* in 1963.³⁶ These seemingly irreverent uses of vanguard painting were additional publicity for the art.

Not only were articles about famous artists published, but also articles about prominent collectors. Such attention began as early as 1950 with *Fortune's* "The Businessman and Picasso," profiling seventeen "relatively new [collectors

more writings by very articulate artists like Motherwell, Reinhardt, Newman, and Gottlieb. These Abstract Expressionist sources are generally less often cited than statements by Warhol. This may be because many Abstract Expressionist statements were published in less widely circulated magazines like *PM*, *Possibilities*, or *Partisan Review* while those of Pop artists appeared in major art journals and mass magazines. Also, since the predominant criticism of Abstract Expressionism was formalist, the artists' intentions were thought not to be very important to the viewer's experience of the artwork. Since this kind of criticism was useless and antagonistic to Pop, the artists' own words became helpful in explaining their art.

Our ideas about Pop and the media are distorted also by Warhol's particularly great following. Other Pop artists were less vocal. For example, Rosenquist had a lively social life; his activities were similar to bar brawl type of the Abstract Expressionists, but hardly garnered him the kind of publicity that Warhol solicited.

³⁵ For further discussion see Whiting, pp. 138-141. Full-page Brazilian Coffee advertisement, *New York Times Magazine* June 28, 1964. The speech/thought bubbles read: "Say Button-nose, this iced coffee sure has that rich, full bodied flavor we fellows go for!" "Ooh, I'm the happiest wife alive. As soon as Jim finishes kissing me I must phone Mom. She was a peach to tell me to make iced coffee with a pure all Brazilian brand!"

³⁶ "American Fashion: The New Soft Look," *Vogue* 117 (March 1, 1951), 156-159; "The Fashion Independent: Marisol," *Harper's Bazaar* 97 (October 1963), 198-201.

of] more controversially radical paintings and sculptures.”³⁷ A number of these patrons went on to collect Abstract Expressionism and were featured in *Artnews* and *Art in America* in the late 1950s when the art boom for vanguard American art was fully underway.³⁸ Then in the 1960s mass magazines began to highlight vanguard collectors.³⁹ While the 1950s art journal articles were illustrated primarily with reproductions of art itself, the mass magazines used large and numerous photographs to depict the collectors and their art *in situ* at home. Robert and Ethel Scull, the patrons most often featured, look exuberant, carefree, and fun-loving surrounded by their Pop Art.⁴⁰ The Sculls became celebrities themselves through their collecting. The publicity they received helped to promote the value of their collection, while attention to art they owned in turn aided the Sculls’ ascent into high society.

This kind of media attention could positively influence other collectors. As Philip Johnson explained, “I find that if I look at a photograph of Ethel Scull, and behind her back hangs a particular painting, I am more apt to take a look at that particular phase of that particular artist’s work than I would if I hadn’t seen it behind her back.”⁴¹ In this way, the value of the painting behind Ethel Scull

³⁷ “The Businessman and Picasso,” *Fortune Magazine* 51 (June 1950), 102.

³⁸ For example, George Heard Hamilton, “The Collector as a Guide to Taste,” *Artnews* 57 (April 1958), 41-43, 58-59; B. H. Friedman, “The New Collector: Three Typical Collections,” *Art in America* 46 (Summer 1958), 12-19; E.P. Richardson, “Collections: Four Environments,” *Art in America* 46 (Summer 1958), 32-44.

³⁹ For example, “At Home With Henry,” *Time Magazine* February 21, 1964, pp. 68-71; Emily Genauer, “Can this be Art?” *Ladies Home Journal* 81 (March 1964), 151-155; Allene Talmey, “Art is the Core,” *Vogue* 144 (July 1964), 116-123, 125; “You Bought It Now You Live with It,” *Life Magazine* July 16, 1965, pp. 58-63.

⁴⁰ Their Abstract Expressionist and other art is rarely pictured, presumably since Pop was the newest and most controversial at the time of the articles.

⁴¹ *Painters Painting*, p. 103.

could increase dramatically as other collectors bought similar works. Moreover, mass media images of major patrons could influence the market of wavering, novice collectors. According to Johnson, “These people that buy, that set standards, make everyone else itch to emulate. The itch to emulate, the desire for status, is certainly one of the main things in our society. It’s not true that you get rich by buying paintings and reselling them later. Nevertheless, if you think it’s true, it’ll help the market.”⁴² The mass media showed a large public whom and what to emulate, nourishing the art market.

While media attention greatly helped the art market to grow and artists to prosper, there were hazards involved in such publicity. As Barbara Rose laments,

The existence of the media as audience for the novel means that *nothing* can ever challenge art from the stance of the far-out again. The minute Pollock ceased to be “Jack the Dripper” for the Luce publications, the radicality of extremism was doomed. . . . The moment private acts became public, subversion was not only applauded but given a platform.⁴³

Rose suggests that media attention compromised the revolutionary politics of vanguard artists, rendering their art ineffectual, meaningless, or conservative even. The mass media greatly contributed to the demise of a politically engaged vanguard, but it was only the most conspicuous of several contributing factors. As we have seen, MoMA vigorously promoted vanguard American art. Both the museum and galleries cultivated collectors. The media generally followed these other two components of the art world, conferring the ultimate sign of success. Mass media endorsement was the final phase of selling vanguard American art.

⁴² *Painters Painting*, p. 103.

⁴³ “The Problems of Criticism, VI: The Politics of Art, Part III,” *Artnews* 7 (May 1969), 48. Pollock was dubbed “Jack the Dripper” in “The Wild Ones,” *Time Magazine* February 20, 1956, p. 75.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

In a series of articles probing art criticism, Barbara Rose states “In the past, lack of patronage, institutional approval, and critical support has defined avant-garde art.”¹ Once these elements and the mass media endorsed Abstract Expressionism, the radicality of the New York School was called into question, yet such support was necessary for the renown that stimulated financial success. This is the paradox of modern art: commercial and popular success are incompatible with vanguardism, yet most artists—no matter how subversive or counter-culture—yearn for this potentially self-destructive success. To sell vanguard American art, artists must sell out. Today this quandary is quotidian; is it possible that postwar artists were more naive? Perhaps, since contemporary modern art had never before experienced commercial and popular success, the American avant-garde had yet to confront the contradictions inherent in the vanguard art market.² Strong reactions against this market motivated antiestablishment trends like earthworks and performance art in the 1960s and 1970s.

Success was not such a problem when the New York School first materialized. Vanguard American art enjoyed neither fame nor fortune through

¹ “The Problems of Criticism, VI: The Politics of Art, Part III,” *Artnews* 7 (May 1969), 48.

² The avant-garde did witness the ill effects of commercialism on the political content of Regionalism however, and Abstract Expressionists specifically wished to avoid such a situation.

the early 1950s. Sales, prices, and recognition began to increase around the time of Jackson Pollock's death in 1956. The years 1958-1959 were pivotal: Abstract Expressionism triumphed in Europe and at the Museum of Modern Art with the "New American Painting" exhibition, sales boomed, and *Life Magazine* mythologized Jackson Pollock, while Jasper Johns's first solo exhibition heralded the spectacular success of the younger generation. By the 1960s, when ultraconservative corporations such as Chase Manhattan Bank began to purchase vanguard American art, it was clear that the American avant-garde was defunct. Although Abstract Expressionism did not look to mass culture for inspiration, its fate was the same as that of the art Thomas Crow discusses: "the avant-garde serves as a kind of research and development arm of the culture industry."³

The transformation of vanguard American art from impoverished obscurity to fame and prosperity occurred through the activities of several elements of the New York art world. MoMA's support conferred a kind of authenticity upon new art. High prices and perceived acclaim from Europe bolstered the museum's efforts. Audience-oriented art dealers and prestige-seeking collectors further promoted the art. Finally, the mass media disseminated information and images to a large, mainstream audience, constructing vanguard art celebrities. Aesthetes may debate formalist concerns and artists' intentions, but, as we have seen, the actual "triumph" of American painting was through savvy mass marketing.

It is virtually impossible to isolate and understand exactly why certain artists or styles are popular and others are not. As Harold Rosenberg observed in a 1965 article, "All of these forces—dealers, museums, collectors—have notoriously failed to affect responses of the art world in at least as many

³ *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 35.

instances as they have succeeded.”⁴ Moreover, it is difficult to isolate components of the market since various elements often cooperate. For example, if the mass media review a Museum of Modern Art exhibition of works from private collections, how can one discern which factor most impacts the art market? My project has sought to show how a number of institutions and individuals together influenced the mid-century market for vanguard American art. While the support of a single museum, gallery, collector, or magazine may not guarantee success, the combined support of several constituents propelled the postwar art market to celebrity and success.

⁴ “The Art Establishment,” *Esquire* 64 (January 1965), 43.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Christine Bianco grew up in South Florida, graduating from Cooper City High School in 1994. She studied the humanities in the honors program at Stetson University in DeLand, Florida, graduating in 1998 with a Bachelor of Arts degree. In 2000 she obtained a Master of Arts degree in art history from the University of Florida with an emphasis on modern art. Next she begins work towards a doctorate in art history at Binghamton University in Binghamton, New York. She anticipates a career in university teaching and research.