

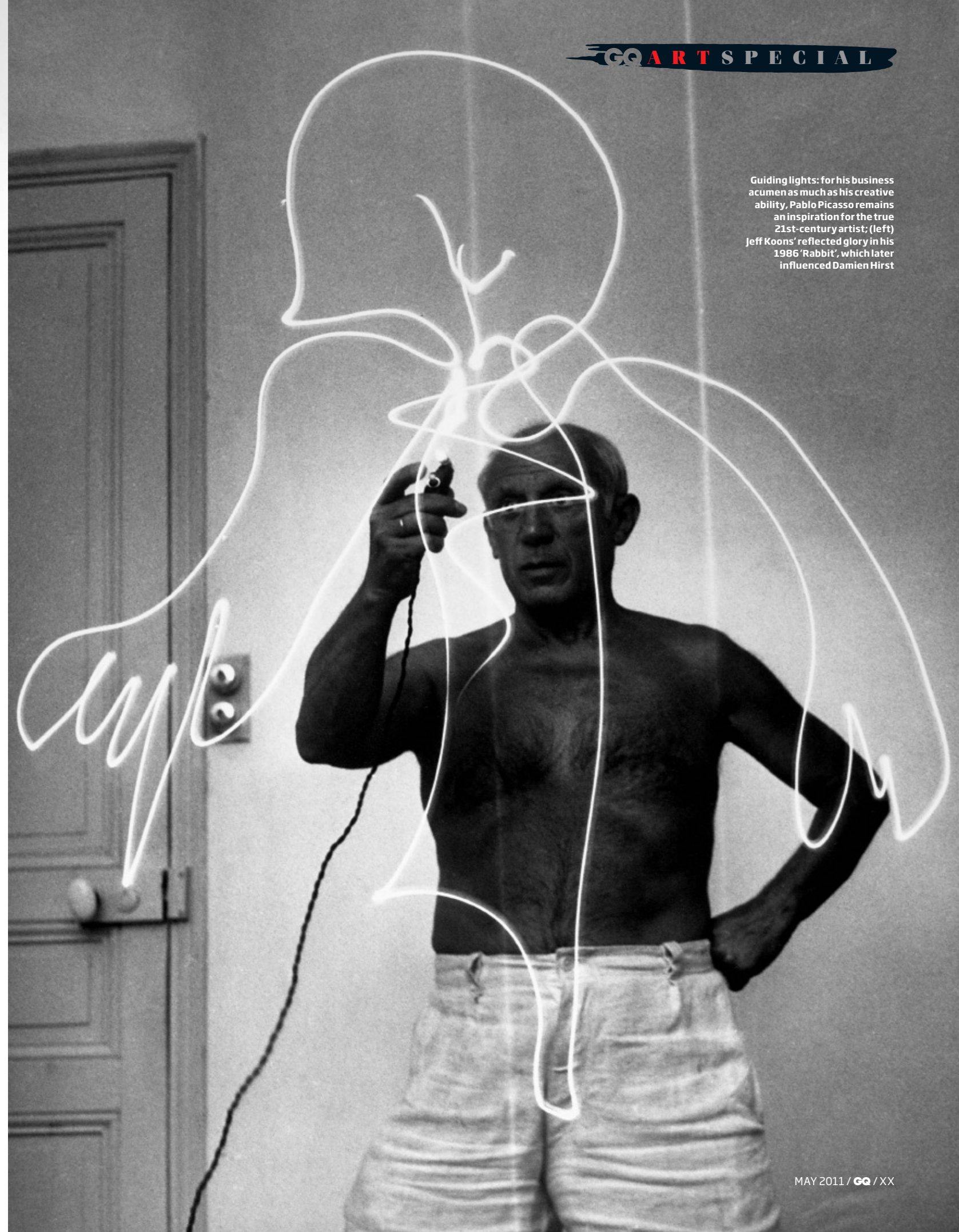
THE A-Z OF MODERN ART

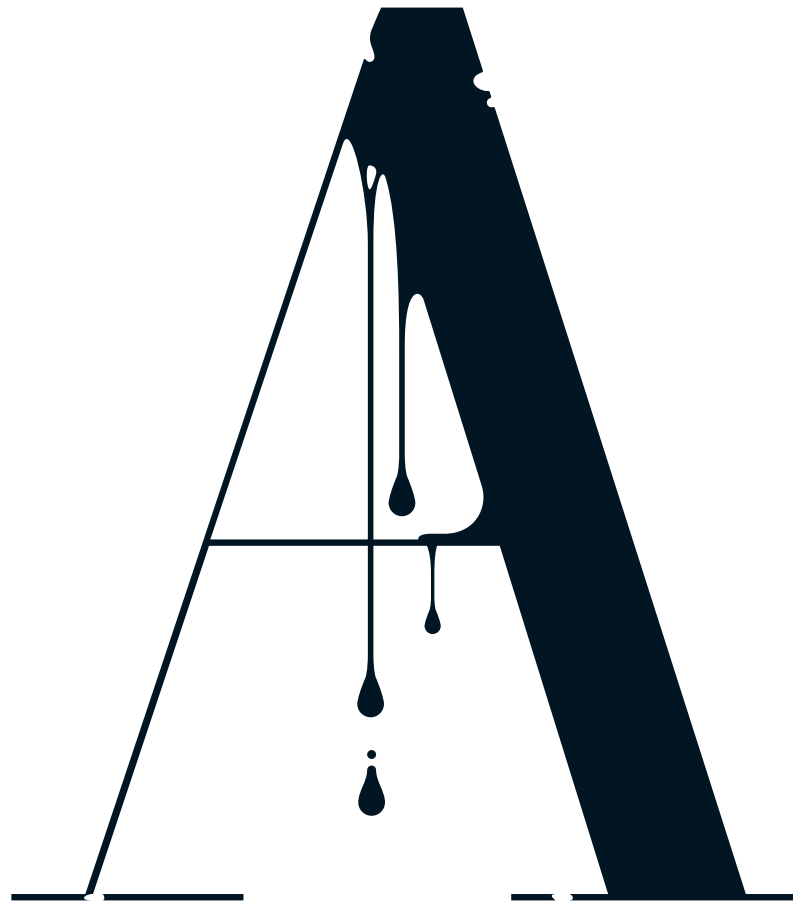
From auction secrets to a former Zoo, via insider trading, the best investments, the myth of Jeff Koons, skulls and a brush with death

BY GLOBAL ART POLYMATH KENNY SCHACHTER

GQ ARTS SPECIAL

Guiding lights: for his business acumen as much as his creative ability, Pablo Picasso remains an inspiration for the true 21st-century artist; (left) Jeff Koons' reflected glory in his 1986 'Rabbit', which later influenced Damien Hirst





ARTISTS: There are many wonderful things about artists, especially the childlike innocence involved in the act of making things as a career choice. Artists have licence to spend a lifetime involved in naive creativity – they never have to leave the sandbox, and get paid handsomely for it. A dose of mischievousness and eccentricity is not only encouraged but expected. The Korean-American video artist Nam June Paik said he became an artist so he could sleep in.

On the other hand, artists can be a capricious and self-absorbed lot. Some certainly strut around with their feathers on full display. A while ago I bought two works from a struggling artist who had been given them as gifts. When I tried to sell the pieces a few years later, the results were astonishing: both artists independently declared the works not to be art. In fact, both pieces were more “art” than the art they normally exhibited – but both made efforts to preclude me from selling their works. It boiled down to issues of trying to control perceptions of the artists and their works.

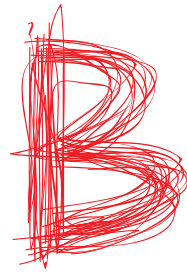
Only in art can someone equally state that an object lifted off the street or appropriated from a newspaper or magazine is his or her creation and

simultaneously declare that something made the old-fashioned way is garbage. Among Richard Prince’s most prized and valuable works are a series of photographs “re-photographed” from a Marlboro ad. I bet the original photographer was less than amused that he got a stipend for his efforts while Prince has been and continues to be paid princely sums (into the seven figures) for his efforts. Anyway, I sold both my disputed works at auction as the houses don’t seem concerned about the intent of the artist when it comes to what is or isn’t art.

AUCTIONS: Auctions, like gallery and fair openings, were not always the star-studded events they are today. Art and auctions were largely ho-hum enterprises peopled by professionals in the trade. Nowadays, auctions are social forums where some love nothing better than waving around paddles in public displays of consumption.

In the past, dealers banded together at public sales to keep prices artificially low, and then bid among themselves after a given sale. Today it’s the reverse, although increasingly auctions are being held online, so buyers are going to have to find a different way to show off.

BLOOMBERG.COM: The media behemoth’s website is the **new art magazine of the 21st century**. Most people in art only look at the pictures and ads in traditional art publications if they or their artists are being written about. You learn more about the art world from **bloomberg.com** or **ft.com** than any art magazine.



COLLECTORS AND CONNOISSEURSHIP: Sadly, there appears to be a diminished amount of passion in the art world (for the art anyway) as the days of connoisseurship are mostly behind us; old-school collectors who never sell and artists with no regard for private planes and *Hello!* belong more and more in a display case in the Natural History Museum. There’s nothing wrong with multimillion-pound trading, but let’s not confuse financial speculation with appreciation.

Not having any means has never been an impediment to a true collector. In the past ten years there has been more growth in the worldwide art market than in the previous 100 years. The first time contemporary art entered the realm of high-end, expensive evening sales at auction was in 1997, when a children’s heart specialist went to jail for embezzling money from a surgery fund in order to feed his collecting habit. Such is the fervour that grips collectors that one could even steal money from the hands of dying children to fulfil the desire for more acquisitions. That’s what I call a hard-core collector.

Strangely, it’s not unusual today for some collectors to buy with their ears rather than eyes. For some, the personalities buying art seem to eclipse what it is they are actually purchasing. But whereas in the past it was critics and collectors like Charles Saatchi who were moving markets, today collectors’ decisions are more likely to be motivated by the shopping lists of Richard Prince, Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst.

COMMISSIONS: Commissions range from 50 per cent to a gallery when

PHOTOGRAPHS (PREVIOUS PAGE) CORBIS; GETTY IMAGES TYPE ILLUSTRATION STEVEN BONNER

they represent an artist or two per cent if you sell a £25m painting. Auction houses today grab 25 per cent on the buy side, and take a sizeable chunk on the sell side too. Who said you can’t get it both ways?

CONTEMPORARY: No one could have predicted how art would fare so well in light of the crushing recession that brought the world’s economy to its knees. But clearly trends have shifted today – in the recent past, £13m Jeff Koons sculptures were being flipped like burgers on the resale market before the crates were even unpacked, and at the same time, you couldn’t give a Monet away.

Today, contemporary art is a long way from selling for the prices of office buildings, but Picassos, Monets and Van Goghs are reaching dizzying heights as we’re in the midst of a flight to quality, with art viewed as a safe harbour in uncertain economic times.

CRITICS: Another casualty of the recent transformation of the art world into a vast money pit is the slow death of the critic. To make an impact today, an art writer has to become a judge on a reality-TV show. Over the years, the balance of power has shifted from critics and dealers who used to be able to make or break a career, to artists and collectors (and artists who collect, see above). Soon criticism will be viewed as a quaint profession of the past.



DEATH: The final curtain is welcomed and embraced on all fronts in the art world. Firstly, it’s handy for prying masterpieces out of long-held private collections (as is another “D” word, divorce), and secondly it’s a sure-fire way to lift an artist’s market out of the doldrums.

PHOTOGRAPHS SIMON UPTON; REX FEATURES

DESIGN ART: This is an artificial term recently coined by an auction house to market high-end furniture and *objets d’art*. What were formerly known as traditional tables and chairs are now turned into precious design editions (12, usually) and the process has raised the bar of what you can get away with charging for a chair. Marc Newson, the poster boy for design art, shows at Gagosian. Clever man. Terence Conran, eat your heart out. >



Part of the furniture: Marc Newson and his biomorphic creations have made design art a serious investment



Passed master: the art world has always held a fascination with death – Salvador Dali, who died in 1989, lay in state for 31 hours

FRIEZE: Art fairs are the most effective and convenient way to reconnoitre what is afoot at any given time. They are wonderful information-gathering affairs as well as the closest the art world gets to fostering a sense of community; we all travel to the same destinations

and socialise with many of the same people across multiple time zones. But the fairs are also deeply hierarchical. The decision-making as to who gets to have a booth, and in which section that booth is located, is based largely on political factors. Even who gets admitted as a guest and when (there are earlier entry slots for VVIPs) are status-laden choices by the powers that be.

With the nonstop attendant social flurry, Art Basel Miami Beach is No.1 in the charts for schmoozing the art party circuit. However, in hot market times at fairs there is competition to purchase new material, and fast, which in such a public forum is not the ideal way to understand and participate in the market. Art should

be slow burn, a contemplative process, not an ad hoc, spur-of-the-moment experience.

GAGOSIAN: It's safe to say that most artists and galleries are like cottage-industry entrepreneurs except for a gallery business model like that of Larry Gagosian, who appears intent on nothing less than world domination, establishing beachheads far and wide, from New York to Athens via Paris, London and Rome. There is no one in galleryland in his rear-view mirror. You could make a flow chart of

the prominent families from which his entire staff hails.

GALLERIES: Sterile places where you are judged head to toe by well-dressed adolescents regarding your status and wallet. They also display art and usually have a uniform architecture composed of clinical white walls and cement floors. Though you can't dismiss the vital role galleries play by archiving the activities of their artists and disseminating to collectors and institutions, why do most have to do their job with such snobbery?

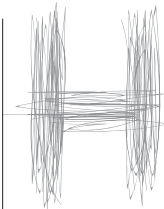
The people who work in these places could just as easily work in snooty fashion shops.

GIACOMETTI, ALBERTO: If this artist were alive today, critics would accuse him of pandering to anorexic/bulimic model-waifs. In the breadth of an artist's career you encounter a curve of good, bad and ugly; but that's fine as it creates access points for people to enter the market at differing price levels. For instance, not everyone could afford a Giacometti sculpture (£65m), but you can find what is considered a less-prized etching that is almost as gripping.

Top draw: Alberto Giacometti casts, like this 1960 pair at the Fondation Beyeler in Basel, may be out of reach for most collectors, but savvy buyers can pick up his etchings for as little as £800



PHOTOGRAPH CORBIS



HAGGLING: The difference between neophyte art collectors and jaded buyers is that newcomers think they're buying something with a designated price requiring payment. A professional collector is like someone negotiating down the price of a pint of milk, not paying for two years, and then cancelling the deal because the milk went sour. Newbies have no idea what they can get away with.

HEDGE FUNDERS: When the market for hedge funds crashed, the traders picked up where their funds left off – in art. Stevie Cohen is the most renowned, and accumulated an encyclopedic collection – everything he buys is the stereotypical image you would see in a reference book.

HIRST, DAMIEN: For better or worse, Hirst has spread the word of contemporary art to all corners of the globe. Through chutzpah, determination and raw talent, he has risen to the status of global brand and made zillions. Though he repeats himself, that shouldn't detract from his vast accomplishments. His animals suspended in formaldehyde are the natural conclusion of the traditional still life. Hirst has made his cake (or had it fabricated) and is eating it.

I forecast that in 15 years, the market for Hirst fakes will total billions.



IMMORTALITY: The notion of evading death by making lasting marks for posterity serves endlessly as the motivation of artists and art.

IMPRESSIONISTS: When the impressionists were first exhibiting their sun-dappled effusions of colour and light they were unanimously derided. That was before they became

sure-fire means for cash-strapped museums to bring in a crowd and multimillion dollar trophies to impress your friends.

INSIDERS: There are ways to legally be an insider trader in the art world, including frontrunning major museum shows prior to public announcements. This entails being privy to information on the future programming of a major museum (or gallery) and then buying (and selling) on such non-public knowledge for quick profit.



JURIES: The mostly arbitrary groups making arbitrary decisions about who wins arbitrary prizes, like the Turner. Once you separate wheat from chaff, art is a personal, transcendent thing, not a competition. These events are marketing schemes to reel in bodies to hapless institutions.



KOONS, JEFF: The (self-created) myth goes that he was a commodities broker who went from hawking works on the trading floor to creating them for collectors. Koons' work has always expressed a colour-filled world of childlike wonderment, perhaps aside from the "Made In



Hot dog: Jeff Koons sits with his polychromed wood 'Yorkshire Terriers', 1991, which fetched £881,250 in 2008

Heaven" series in which he is depicted having sex with ex-wife Cicciolina, a former porn star, in every orifice imaginable. Today, Koons is known for his sculptures of inflatable toys cast in aluminium, and shiny fabrications of balloon dogs, hearts and flowers, made for millions and sold for more. One of his pieces, "Three Ball Total Equilibrium Tank (Two Dr J Silver Series, Spalding NBA Tip-Off)", from 1985, consists of three basketballs suspended in a tank, probably spawning the vitrines of Hirst.

LIQUOR: The art world has moved on from absinthe to abstinence. Gone are the freewheeling days when artists were seen as reckless characters in bohemian bars – now it's tea and teetotallers. There are paintings entitled "The Absinthe Drinker" from Manet, Degas and Picasso as well as tales from the legendary Cedar Tavern in New York half a century later where De Kooning, Rothko and Pollock drank before most were banned. It's also the place that cemented the abstract expressionist school of painting. Skip forward another 50 years and there are stories of YBAs on week-long benders, Tracey Emin drunk on TV and Hirst serving up his willy on a tray to Groucho patrons. Yet today, artists are too preoccupied with careers and stock portfolios. ➔

MUSEUMS: Behaviour in the mid-level museum sphere can resemble small-town politics, with establishments that have little money and little opportunity to make a sizeable impact. In a time when even the biggest institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York have been so strapped for cash they can't paint the walls between exhibits, museums are losing their capacity to make an impact. Being in such financial straits has, in turn, reduced the adventurousness of public museums' programming capabilities.



OLD MASTERS: Art is a world of specialisation akin to medicine; each niche has its own visual, visceral and verbal language. There are antiquities, Renaissance paintings, British modernism, American painting and so on. One cannot have an umbrella understanding of the overall field without a great deal of studying. I do not understand old masters. I wouldn't know a Holbein from a Holiday Inn painting. With so many experts in the field, you had better know your stuff or you will be left with your trousers down.



P

PICASSO: Pablo said anyone can learn to paint but it takes a lifetime to learn to paint like a child. Picasso is the benchmark, the gold standard against which all levels of creativity are measured. A prodigious life and output produced countless works in a variety of media. Picasso was among

the first market-savvy practitioners, well-versed in the value of his art and not shy about manipulating things to achieve vast material wealth. He was not above pre-dating his recent output to reflect the fact his earlier works fetched more money than later ones. Clearly, Koons and Hirst could stand to learn from the master.

PRICING: A collector off the street might not be aware that discounts are built into the asking price of art, but they are taken for granted by long-term collectors (see *Haggling*). Galleries, and the creeps who work for them, can be so intimidating that potential purchasers may not venture to timidly attempt to shave as little as five or ten per cent off. But collectors are not beyond asking for 50 per cent or more off the ticket price! It never hurts to ask. But with the market firmly in rebound mode, we are almost back to the point where you are lucky to achieve 10-15 per cent.

In the not-too-distant past, a dealer could buy a work at public auction (these were sparsely attended, professional events) and the next day quadruple the price in the gallery or at an art fair. There was no way to know, no system of checks and balances. This was radically changed with the advent of web pricing databases – Artnet.com and Artprice.com have revolutionised the way art business is conducted.

Visiting Art Basel Miami Beach last year, I eyed a Warhol portrait for a client when a friend called having spotted serious dialogue going on with another potential buyer in front of the work I admired. I made my way to the booth of the dealer and noticed he was in conversation with a doctor and medical entrepreneur I'd only just had breakfast with. The art community is like picking up a rock and finding 300 worms underneath. I parked myself behind my "friend's" back and began my surreptitious counter-negotiations. Unbeknownst to the doctor, due to my friendly relationship with the dealer, I was told what was offered on the painting and also that the doctor wanted a further day to conduct due diligence on the price history for such a work. I was, in turn, offered a price if I bought it there and then, which I did, and made my way completely unnoticed after the ordeal.

PRIVATE MUSEUMS: Although museums were once independent, quasi-objective, publicly supported institutions with posterity at heart,

PHOTOGRAPH GETTY IMAGES

today they're being replaced by private vanity enterprises resembling ornate bonnet ornaments atop a wealthy patron's prized car. Private museums are becoming arbiters of taste and in the process, market value and credibility boosters. Or at least they are trying hard to have such an impact.

PROSTITUTION: When it comes to making, buying, selling and presenting art we are all hookers of one stripe or another. I know an art dealer, always surrounded by girls, all gorgeous. When I asked about his harem, he went on to relate how many billionaire collectors he has done business with out of his procurement activities in the escort sector. As Malcolm X put it, by any means necessary.



QUOTES: When a dealer entered Picasso's studio, viewed a new painting and queried: "What is that painting about?" Picasso shot back, "About 50 grand to you."

RESERVES: When you put up an artwork at auction there is a high and low estimate of what it is expected to achieve on sale; as a seller, you are held to your reserve, which cannot exceed the low estimate, so you must take care. A recent impressionist and modern sale in New York saw some extraordinarily high estimates, which bordered on avarice and resulted in very public, horrible failures. When art doesn't sell it becomes burnt (scorned; hard to re-sell). In art, it's seller beware!

S

SAATCHI: When it comes to certain collectors and supporters, you can't deny someone like Charles Saatchi his due for his relentless mining of artistic talent; it's a full-time job

and a physically strenuous one at that. Constantly chasing young, new art (with my bad sense of direction) is more than a full-time job, way too exhausting and expensive to think about. But in the process, he rather foolishly dealt away masterpieces that

would have permitted him to trade into retirement in perpetuity. Instead, Saatchi horse-traded his way into a lower tax bracket. The saying rings true that you sell art to make money and keep it to make wealth.

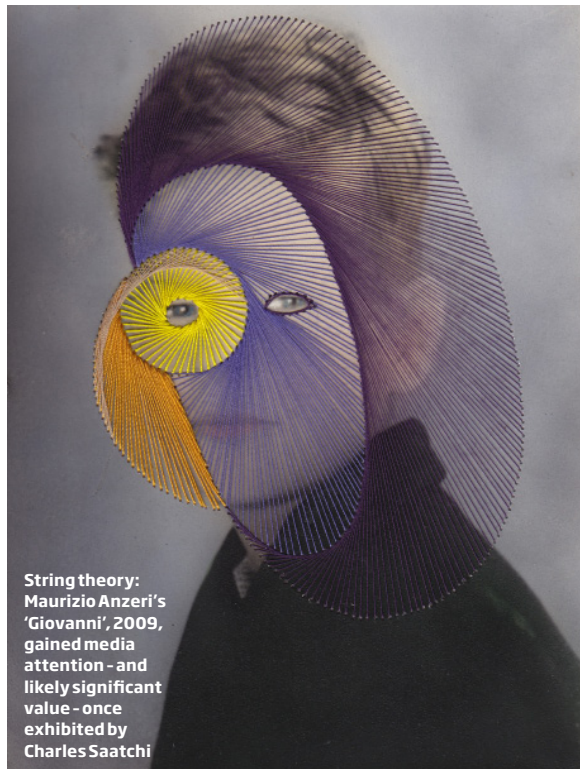
SCULPTURE: Objects are inherently more difficult to collect than paintings as they take up more space and are not as portable. Large paintings are worth less due to the real estate needed to exhibit them. Even so, the art world is always after the next new thing and now sculpture is the new painting.

SKULLS: Hirst has forever ruined the impact and desirability of the representation of the skull by flogging it to death in the form of diamonds, prints, shirts, paintings, sculptures, keyrings...

STUDENTS: The mind-set of many students in today's art academies seems to be as much about seeking tuition in PR, self-promotion and networking as about learning to draw a nude ☹



Panel show: blurring the lines between sculpture and installation, Cornelia Parker commissioned the British Army to blow up her shed to create 'Cold, Dark Matter: An Exploded View', 1991



String theory: Maurizio Anzeri's 'Giovanni', 2009, gained media attention - and likely significant value - once exhibited by Charles Saatchi

➤ accurately. After Marcel Duchamp put a urinal in an exhibition and declared it art in 1917, the *Yellow Pages* has become an integral tool of the artist. The “readymade” – Duchamp’s term for plucking an industrial object out of a catalogue and re-contextualising it in a gallery setting – was replaced by what I call the “had-it-made”, where a few calls to a fabricator can overcome any shortfalls in virtuosity. How many art stars of today could draw anything other than a stick figure?

Also, the caution and conservatism you see at the graduate level in art is mind-boggling; they are often no different from business or law departments, a professional finishing school readying these mini-entrepreneurs to crack the art market. During critiques I was giving, one student told me that a well-known contemporary artist told her not to use a particular material for a work, an assertion which, in my estimation, had absolutely no foundation in logic. The visiting artist probably couldn’t think of anything else to say, though I admit you really are on the spot in some of those critique sessions, having to think on your feet all day in front of needy young artists. So what did the artist do? Of course she trashed and remade her work. At the grad level at least, it’s about connecting with guest lecturers and visiting artists and paving the way to a lucrative niche of one’s own.

TRADERS: Art has become a fully fledged asset class. If you want to get involved you had better know what you are doing and have access to information, as there are hordes with their noses pressed to computer screens trading art like much corn.



UNDervalUED: When the market’s volatility resembled the behaviour of a crack addict short of a fiver, I abstained for three years, refusing to pay historic prices for art with no history. Today, with lots of heat still around so much art, I find prints and drawings to be inherently undervalued by the flashy art collecting public and a great entry point at which to jump in.



VALUE: People believe that art is only subjective, and lacking inherent value – though I can on one level understand why it entails a certain leap of faith to fathom paying tens of millions and more for what amounts to £6.86 of pigment, canvas and stretcher bars. But what cannot be overestimated is the point that ever since art came off the cave walls, it’s been covetously and conspicuously collected. Calculable measures exist that can be systematically applied to ascertain the inherent values of art. There is a laundry list of things that constitute value in the art world: who’s selling (the gallery and its reputation, and auction exposure), who’s buying (the stature of the collectors), who’s writing about it, and which museum is exhibiting, or rather, whose private museum is supporting it.

At the onset of the recession, a friend in finance said he hoped I realised the works I yearned for and dealt in would be rendered valueless. He obviously wasn’t the type to beg, borrow or steal for art. Though the recession has clearly caused a shift in what is sought after and affected values, we are today at historic high levels for art. For every bust in the art

market lurks a bigger boom down the horizon and vice versa. The art market is a lovely, endless cycle, but one that seems to grow and grow over time with no bounds in sight.

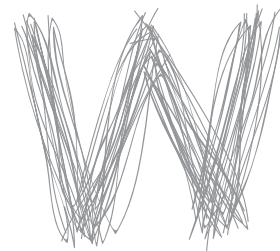
Sure there continue to be plenty of naysayers and party poopers who moan that it’s an artificial bubble bound to burst. And true enough, there are many people in it for the wrong reasons, but this is also a good thing, as it only contributes to broaden the markets and create spillover opportunities for the various segments of art.

With 1,000-point intra-day swings on the stock market, interest rates at historic lows, banks teetering and companies uneven at best, art has never looked like a better place to be. And the dividend it throws off in good times and bad is the visual pleasure gained by looking at it. The continuing international economic instability is a major factor driving today’s market for art and the ever-increasing worldwide attention – there are more people today making, looking at, writing about, showing and buying art than at any other time in history.

VAN GOGH: He cut off his ear in an act of desperate, creative destruction for reasons still little understood today, and, with one swift act of self-harming, he launched the cult of personality as we know it in the world of art.

VITRINES: What began as a glass display box in a history or science museum became the signature framing device masterminded by Koons and Hirst to confer value on worthless basketballs and roadkill.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF SAATCHI COLLECTION



WARHOL, ANDY: Warhol dreamt about money, made art about money but never made the money he fantasised about till after his death. His auction record during his lifetime was a mere £257,000 in 1986 for a piece fittingly titled “200 One Dollar Bills” purchased by Paulina Karpidas and recently sold by the same collector for £26,257,500. For all his aspirations, Warhol was never able to accumulate great wealth for himself like Hirst has managed. He was like George Best or the American baseball player Hank Aaron: they expanded the audience to masses while opening future doors for others to earn corporate executive salaries. The difference between Warhol and Hirst is that with Warhol, it was all about fame and money; fame he achieved, wealth only posthumously. But there would be no Damien without dear old Andy.

WEBSITES: As previously mentioned, forget art publications: there is artnet.com, bloomberg.com, artsjournal.com, artinfo.com, theartnewspaper.com, lindsaypollock.com, artforum.com. In fact, there’s barely any reason to leave the house.



X-RATED: I am no prude, but I find the countless contemporary art comprised of explicit tits and ass, in all manner of shape and form, to be gratuitous and calculated to titillate. I’ll pass, thank you very much. That is what the internet was invented for.

TYPE ILLUSTRATION STEVEN BONNER



YBAS: Young British Art was once a significant movement (perhaps the last) that put Britart on the map. It was cemented by the triumvirate of Hirst making the art, Jay Jopling selling it, and Saatchi buying it. Most of it was made to shock and that it did, if only for five minutes. Now the artists are no longer young and the statement by Jopling that the only significant art today is being made in London is as stale as the formaldehyde in the first (of many) tanks.



Shock and awe: the YBAs’ output was eagerly snapped up across the globe, but Fiona Rae’s ‘Untitled (Emergency Room)’, 1996, resides close to home, part of the Tate Collection



ZOO: Zoo was once an art fair for young, affordable, undiscovered art and artists, but since the art world came to resemble a zoo in the frenzy of primal, animalistic activity surrounding the market, it is now extinct. ☹