



# *It Is Okay for Artists to Make Money...No, Really, It's Okay*

Robert D. Austin  
Lee Devin

**Working Paper**

**09-128**

Copyright © 2009 by Robert D. Austin and Lee Devin

Working papers are in draft form. This working paper is distributed for purposes of comment and discussion only. It may not be reproduced without permission of the copyright holder. Copies of working papers are available from the author.

**It Is Okay for Artists to Make Money...No, Really, It's Okay**

Robert D. Austin  
*Copenhagen Business School*  
*Harvard Business School*

Lee Devin  
*Swarthmore College*  
*People's Light and Theatre*

May 8, 2009

# ***It Is Okay for Artists to Make Money...No, Really, It's Okay***

## **ABSTRACT**

In this paper, we examine the apparent conflict between artistic and commercial objectives within creative companies, taking as our point of departure a particularly energetic debate during a symposium at the 2007 Academy of Management meetings. We surface the assumptions that underlie such debates, compare them with findings from our research on creative industries, and identify three “fallacies” that sometimes enter into discussions of art in relation to money. This, in turn, leads us to propose a framework to support more productive discussion and to describe a direction for management research that might better integrate art and business practices. We conclude that despite an inclination to take offense that often attends the close juxtaposition of art and commerce, which was very much in evidence at that AoM symposium in Philadelphia, the interests of art, artists, and business can be best served if *more* commerce enters into the world of art, not less.

## Introduction

At the 2007 Academy of Management meetings in Philadelphia, we took part in a symposium conceived by dt Ogilvie of Rutgers Business School called “The Art and Design of Strategy: Going Beyond Science in the Practice of Management,” along with Frances Fabian (University of Memphis), and Cynthia Weick (University of the Pacific).<sup>1</sup> The format called for brief presentations, comment by a discussant, then audience interaction. As things got going, the room overflowed with people, probably because of Professor Ogilvie’s major *coup*: She had signed up Henry Mintzberg as discussant. We were delighted that this eminent management scholar would comment on our work since we have long admired his.

Given the short time available for each participant presentation (10 minutes), we chose to focus on a single case. We started with photos, a musical slideshow, and other PR and marketing materials from a Danish company called “Vipp,” which makes designer trashcans. The one we featured, a floor standing model in elegant stainless steel, sells for about \$500 (US). Even at such a high price, people buy them. The company has grown at double-digit annual rates in recent years. Their \$200 toilet brush sells well, too.

The Vipp example attracted us, as researchers, because the company sells products in categories that consumers have traditionally valued functionally, not aesthetically. Most people mostly care about how well a trashcan or toilet brush does its job. That has determined how much people will pay for one: how well it works. But not these trashcans and toilet brushes. There’s no way functionality alone can justify their prices. People must be buying something else—something worth a lot.

Vipp’s chairman, Jette Egelund, and Vipp employees believe they understand that something else. People buy Vipp bins and brushes, says Egelund, because they’re *beautiful*.

---

<sup>1</sup> With Frances Fabian, Henry Mintzberg (discussant), dt Ogilvie, and Cynthia Weick, “The Art and Design of Strategy: Going Beyond Science in the Practice of Management,” Symposium, 2007 Academy of Management Meetings, Philadelphia, PA, August 8, 2007.

Because they are—as the firm’s designers, marketers, and PR people assert without a blush, *works of art*.



Others outside the firm agree. In the spring of 2006, the Louvre exhibited Vipp bins (the company calls them “bins” not “cans”). Other museums have followed suit. There’s a Vipp bin in the permanent collection of the Danish Design Centre, for example. Designer Karim Rashid, in a commentary about Vipp products, had this to say in defense of the idea of a trash bin as *objet d’art*:

Certain forms, lines, colours, textures, functions, all touch and communicate to our senses and our daily experiences. I believe that objects and spaces need to touch our

sensual side, touch our emotions, they need to elevate a certain experience, and they need to be human. Love and desire are part of my interests in “sensualizing” our physical material world.<sup>2</sup>

This works, for some people at least. A student in one of our classes admitted that she owns four Vipp, despite her modest household budget. “I just love them,” she said.

At the symposium, our academic commentary touched upon the importance of intangibles, the role of narrative, the experience economy, and other notions. But we boiled it all down into a simpler message: Business needs to understand what people actually buy when they splash out for a Vipp bin or brush; to understand it, we said, managers and thought leaders must take aesthetics, art, and artists, seriously. A Vipp bin that sells for \$500 might cost as little as \$50 to manufacture, taking into account COGS, direct labor, and plant overhead (but not SG&A).<sup>3</sup> A profit margin that’s 90% of the price ought to cause business execs to sit up and take notice. Wal-Mart, the world champ of “everyday low cost,” has lately failed in attempts to convince customers to pay a small premium for new upscale clothing brands.<sup>4</sup> Moving customers to a higher price, we concluded, especially such a very much higher price for a functional object, must involve something more than conventional business wisdom. Otherwise Wal-Mart, with access to pretty much any business consultants it wants, should have been able to do it. What, we asked, does Vipp understand that Wal-Mart can’t figure out?

### **Enter Professor Mintzberg**

We chose this example because it intrigues us, because it’s extreme, even provocative. But it provoked Henry Mintzberg in a way we didn’t anticipate. When time came for him to comment on what he had heard, he rose, turned to the audience and said (we paraphrase, but this is close):

---

<sup>2</sup> From *Vipp, the Conran Shop and eighteen leading designers*, a company document.

<sup>3</sup> This is our estimate. The company does not disclose this cost.

<sup>4</sup> See “Wal-Mart’s move into upscale Target territory,” by Daniel Jacobs, August 21, 2006, *International Business Times*, <http://www.ibtimes.com/articles/20060821/walmart-target-retail-upscale-competition.htm>, and “Wal-Mart’s Mid-Life Crisis,” cover story in *BusinessWeek*, April 30, 2007, by Anthony Bianco.

"A world in which people spend \$500 on a trash can is not one I want to live in. There are too many problems in the world; pay \$30 for a trash can and give the rest to a charity that's trying to end world hunger or common diseases." Although we also favor ending hunger and diseases, Professor Mintzberg's reaction caught us off guard. Not sensible enough to keep quiet, we offered a couple of thoughts in response, one an assertion, "No, Henry, the world you don't want to live in is one where all trash bins cost \$8 because they're produced in sweatshops," and the other a question, "How much progress do we need on world hunger and disease before we're allowed to buy tickets to the opera?"

These remarks appeared to anger Mintzberg, as well they might have, but they electrified the room. Everyone tried to get into the discussion at once and Mintzberg had to battle to clarify his views when people weighed in on his side, and to respond when others disagreed with him. Professors Fabian and Weick added insightful comments and Professor Ogilvie moderated expertly. The result was a rather successful symposium, intellectually exciting for most everyone who attended, including (we think, hope) Professor Mintzberg.

We want to probe the professor's objection, but before we do let us state the observation his objection lead us to, and the reaction we had that motivates us to write this essay: *An inclination to take offense often attends the close juxtaposition of art and commerce.* For some reason people become bad tempered or think something needs fixing when artists or art objects make money. But that can't be right, can it? Surely more artists ought to make more money more often, and the fact that they don't—*that's* the real problem. In our analysis and arguments from here on, we will aim to support this case.

People's thinking on this subject often contains unspoken assumptions, inconsistent logic, and fallacious givens. We'll use this story about the AoM meetings, along with another we'll get to in a moment, to unpack these problematic views and arguments. This will lead us to three fallacies we'll consider and (mostly) discount. We intend, ultimately, to encourage a conversation that avoids bad temper and seeks enlightenment. To that end, we'll propose an approach to art

and money that we think *can* make the world a better place, a goal we share with Professor Mintzberg. But first, a look at that other story...

### **An Artist Takes Offense**

A while back we posted to Aacorn, an Internet listserv for people interested in ideas at the intersection of arts and business,<sup>5</sup> a message disapproving the Academy of Management's decision to stop funding the "Fringe Café." At the annual meetings, this innovative forum provided a meeting place for researchers and artists working on art and business topics. In the 21st century, we argued in our message, people more than ever want an aesthetic dimension in products and services; customers want this enough to pay high prices for it. Popular judgments about what's "cool" can make the difference between an okay product and a blockbuster. To defund an initiative aimed at understanding all that seemed to us shortsighted. As we enter the 21st century "experience economy," we wrote, art more than ever relates urgently to business. Our email aligned with many other posts on the list that day, all of which criticized the AoM decision.

But our message alone elicited this angry response from an artist: "How dare you suggest that art must *justify* itself on the basis of its contributions to success in business?" (Emphasis ours, and again we paraphrase). This, too, caught us off guard. We hadn't dared any such thing. We'd written that business leaders need to pay more attention to art, artists, and art making, even while thinking very narrowly of profits and business success. We suggested some reasons why. The angry artist read something very different.

As in our exchange with Professor Mintzberg, we seemed to have hit a button, a hot one, eliciting a lively response to ideas we didn't write and meanings we didn't intend. Most interesting to us for our purpose here: This is another example of energy released when art and

---

<sup>5</sup> "AACORN's intent is to develop and promote the field of organizational aesthetics (broadly defined). We wish to provide a wide range of forums where researchers interested in connecting art, aesthetics, and creative practice within organizational and work settings can meet, exchange ideas, share resources, and experiment with new forms of thinking and practice. These forums include things like websites, conferences, joint publications, and joint action events." From <http://www.aacorn.net/about.htm>.

commerce come into close proximity. We offer these two instances because they are illustrative and representative of attitudes and ideas we have encountered frequently as we have researched art-based businesses. These examples will help us do what we want to do next: unpack the attitudes and ideas we can infer from these exchanges. These often operate implicitly, and they point to three fallacies, themselves often implicit, about relationships between art and commerce.

### **Fallacy #1: Art is a luxury, an indulgence**

How can you justify making art and selling it for a profit when there are hungry people in the world? Whenever juxtaposing art and commerce provokes offense, check to see if this idea lurks in the background. In our years of research and experience in creative businesses, it's surprisingly common. It often informs the views of people who might not admit to it in an overt formulation.

It's not a modern view. In twelfth century Europe both the Cistercians and the Carthusians mounted campaigns against the arts of church decoration. Hugh of Fouilloi described it [church art] as "a wondrous though perverse delight." The perversity concerns "whether the churches should be decorated sumptuously if the children of God were living in poverty."<sup>6</sup> The ubiquity and opulence of church art prompted this ascetic critique; the rich and sensuous temptations of decoration filled every church. The analogy to modern cultures so opulent that they keep garbage in luxury while people lack food and housing *is* compelling. When Mintzberg asserts that we should spend less on goods and donate what we save to a good cause, he joins distinguished company with long history.

But this apparently sensible position becomes problematic on close examination. According to this view, art, though pleasurable, gains legitimate value only after you've provided for everyone's material needs. Maslow's hierarchy of needs implies a hierarchy of values that

---

<sup>6</sup> Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, trans. Hugh Bredin, New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1986, p. 6.

obliges art to stay 'way up at the top, among the "self-actualizing" inessentials.<sup>7</sup> Our response to Mintzberg displayed a problem with this view: How far do you take the argument? How far along the "ending world hunger scale" must we progress to justify buying a painting? Drinking good beer or a great bottle of wine? Going to the theatre or a movie? Does it depend on what's playing?

It doesn't make sense to banish art from the world until we've got the air, water, food, shelter, sleep, safety, security etc. needs covered for everyone. Nor does this happen. Even barely subsisting subsistence economies support art. As Rasmus Bech Hansen, managing director of the design firm Kontrapunkt said at an event we recently attended: "Art matters, and people care about it, in conditions of great need or great abundance." A similar sentiment may in part have motivated that artist's protest in response to our Aacorn post; he objects, as we read it, to the idea of art slumming in company with mere commodities. He seems to think, in fact, that art ought to be put on a pedestal, considered on a different scale of value than mere stuff. Not only is art essential, it should take priority over the everyday.

This reflects his personal standards of valuation, of course. Not everyone need share these. Another person might reasonably take a different point of view. It's very likely that some people, maybe many people, spend less on art in times of hardship. For these people, art *is* up at the top of the Maslow hierarchy. But there's a substantial distance between an individual making that choice and general disapproval of any value system that doesn't enforce that hierarchy. Choosing not to spend on art is quite a different matter from asking that others justify their spending on it.

In its origins art needed no justification, not because of its purity, its distance from the market stalls or "slime of earth,"<sup>8</sup> or its moral superiority over gainful work, but because the behaviors we now call "art" had a central, daily place in everyone's life. In such conditions, it would never occur to anyone to separate them off from other activity necessary to survival, let

---

<sup>7</sup> A.H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review*, 50 (1943):370-96.

<sup>8</sup> Ecco, p. 14. Quoting Suger, Abbot of St. Denis, the man in charge of art and architecture on the Ile de France in Paris.

alone to *justify* them. In three important, related books, Ellen Dissanayake mounts a formidable argument that the behaviors we call art are biologically generated, central to our humanity, and of evolutionary significance as vital aspects of the difference between humans and other primates.<sup>9</sup> In her view (and ours) art isn't something to value only after everything else is taken care of. For most of human history art behavior so occupied the center of life that it couldn't be conceived as separate, no one ever questioned its importance.

On close examination, then, the idea of art as mere indulgence is difficult to defend. Indeed, it may be a straw man: We suspect that most people inclined to resist paying so much for a trashcan would, nevertheless, agree with us, and with the angry artist, that art *is* essential. Perhaps some of these people haven't considered possible inconsistencies between their views about the importance of art and their instinctive reaction to an expensive trashcan. Or maybe that's not the reason. Mintzberg is a hard man to accuse of not noticing inconsistencies. And, despite our inference that for the professor a Vipp bin is an indulgence, he wasn't saying that about *all* art, nor do we suppose he would take that position. So there must be some other explanation why a very expensive trashcan positioned as art prompts people to take offense. This brings us to the next fallacy...

## **Fallacy #2: Yeah, but *that's* not art; it's not any good**

What distinguishes art from not-art? It's a genuine can of worms, this question of what's art and what isn't, and not one we'll resolve here. But we can contemplate what might lie behind a claim like "That's not art," and consider the claim's validity. When someone makes this accusation, they're often noticing some aspect of an alleged *objet d'art* that strikes them as, shall we say, "irregular"; often, the nature of the perceived irregularity reveals something about the accuser's casual definition of art. Let's explore some possible bases of such definitions.

---

<sup>9</sup> Ellen Dissanayake, *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art Comes From and Why*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992; *What is Art For?*, 1998; *Art and Intimacy: How the Arts Began*, 2000.

Maybe art should have content, be “about” something, something serious and worthy. A lot of art doesn’t make the cut on this criterion. Andy Warhol’s soup cans, Claes Oldenberg’s limp hamburgers, Alexander Calder’s giant but genial mobiles, or Christo’s huge, apparently pointless constructions—all these seem to offer only themselves: mute but exuberant. Art or not art? Most people today would, we think, say “art.” But perhaps this content criterion does suggest a kind of hierarchy. Is there a significant, qualitative difference between a political cartoon by Oliphant and, say, *Guernica* by Picasso? If so, what is it? Can whatever it is be generalized to other classes of “art” and “craft”? Is there a difference between the guy who blows glass ornaments and beady-eyed creatures in his booth at the County Fair, and Hank Adams, who casts monumental glass sculptures that end up in museums? Hank Adams certainly thinks so. So do the owners of the galleries where he exhibits his work, for sale. Perhaps somewhere down the hierarchy, well above where trashcans and toilet brushes come in, things stop being art. If Vipp trash bins and toilet brushes *are* art, maybe they’re art of a lesser kind.

Or maybe art should be difficult, hard to make. This idea is probably left over from the ancient understanding of art as craft, skill. The guilds protected (by keeping secret) their “mysteries.” Anyone who wanted to learn them underwent an arduous apprenticeship, years of training.<sup>10</sup> Art, then, is the expression of long training and uncommon skills and talents. A crude painting by an amateur? Not art. Rembrandt’s “Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer”? Art. A play mounted by a school group? Not art. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* mounted by the RSC? Art. A trash bin made in a factory by a for-profit company? Does that express enough training, skill and talent? Perhaps not.

Sometimes the irregularity lies in how a supposed work of art violates formulated rules. Horace on Tragedy: “A play...should consist of five acts—no more, no less. A god must not be introduced unless a difficulty occurs worthy of such a deliverer; nor should a fourth actor be forward to speak.” Violate these rules (and the many others Horace puts forth), and you risk

---

<sup>10</sup> See Epstein, S. A. (1995), *Wage Labor and Guilds in Medieval Europe*, Chapel Hill: UNC Press.

sinking “to the level of tavern-talk.” Those who admire work that does not comply with these criteria do so “far too tolerantly.”<sup>11</sup> The dramatic art called Tragedy is that which follows these rules. Perhaps a play out of compliance with these specs mustn’t be called a Tragedy.

These criteria, and others you can think of, share a problem: They all prove too confining, ultimately. Art shatters old categories. Anything truly new appears formless at first; unless we have a category for a thing, we don’t recognize it. Consequently, pioneers in any art often suffer negative reactions from audiences who don’t recognize their work as art. The audience rioted at the Paris premiere of Stravinsky’s ballet, *The Rite of Spring*.<sup>12</sup> It’s a standard of the repertory now, made popular by Walt Disney. It took years for Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* to achieve wide recognition as a dramatic masterpiece. At its US premiere, starring E. G. Marshall and Bert Lahr, it bombed. The director said that he’d never seen so many people walk out of a show. Then he passed by the box office the next morning (“Just to see...”). A line! Hope bloomed, until he found out that the line was people queuing up to get their money back.<sup>13</sup> Harold Pinter almost gave up writing at the beginning of his career because of shockingly negative reviews of *The Birthday Party*, now a classic.<sup>14</sup> Both playwrights won the Nobel Prize.

Dissanayake suggests that art is a behavior: Making things special and making special things. Since we want to write about as wide a selection of art as possible, we’ll take this as a working definition. Art is whatever our anguished correspondent fears that commerce will corrupt. Philosophical questions of aesthetics concern us here less than the motives and reasoning that underlie people’s claims about what is or isn’t art.

However—we’ve said we suspect that most people who have a problem with the expensive Vipp trash bin would *not* argue that art is mere indulgence. Similarly, we suspect that

---

<sup>11</sup> “The Art of Poetry,” trans. Blakenev, Edward Henry, London: Scholartis Press, Oxford University Press, 1928 (original 24-20 BC).

<sup>12</sup> [Radio Lab, Show 202: "Musical Language"](#), New York: WNYC (21 April 2006). Host/Producer: Jad Abumrad, Co-Host: Robert Krulwich, Producer: Ellen Horne, Production Executives: Dean Capello and Mikel Elcessor.

<sup>13</sup> See Schneider, A. (1986), *Entrances*, New York: Viking, p. 233.

<sup>14</sup> [Michael Billington, "Fighting Talk", \*The Guardian\*, guardian.co.uk](#), 3 May 2008, [Web](#), 10 June 2008: "Slated by the critics, [the play] nearly ended Harold Pinter's career. "

such folks would *not* say that a trash bin *can't* be art. They might accept Dissanayake's very broad definition. If so, the root of their objection to the Vipp trash bin lies elsewhere.

There could be a more subtle concern here, with this particular situation, this particular trashcan and company. Not that the bin fails to satisfy criteria, but that it somehow represents something disingenuous going on: Someone *pretending* to make art in order to make money. Maybe there's some kind of art trick at work here, and either there aren't real artists in this story, or if there are, they aren't the ones making the money. Mintzberg actually said something like this during the Philadelphia symposium. This assertion goes to the intentions of the makers of a thing offered as art. Are they sincere? Is the work authentic in this sense?

Let's first answer the question as it concerns Vipp. We've studied the company closely and written a case study about it.<sup>15</sup> We can assure readers that they certainly *appear* sincere in their desire to make an artful trash bin. Jette Egelund does not appear duplicitous when she says in hushed tones (as she did in our class) "I have looked at this bin all my life [the first one was made by her father in 1939], and I still quite like to look at it"; if she is dissembling when she calls the bin "beautiful," then she is a very good pretender. Designers at the company speak earnestly of the "DNA" of their products, and ask if proposals for new products are "Vipp" enough; they debate and argue about it. They work in ways that our research shows us resemble artists' ways of working. Sofie Egelund (Jette's daughter and a Vipp owner) strives to create a connective design fabric across the family of the firm's products: "The feelings and values you get from one product," she says, "should be connected to the other products." We have observed all this at close range, and it didn't look disingenuous.

But let's address the concern more generally: The idea that businesses might "fake out" their customers by adding surface effects to a gormless product, that they can trick people into paying a premium for art-ish wrappers or injections, is concerning. Once, after we presented the

---

<sup>15</sup> Austin, R. D. and D. Beyersdorfer, "Vipp A/S," Harvard Business School Case 607-052 (2007).

Vipp story at a [name omitted to permit blind review] event, an alumna emerged from the audience to argue that Vipp's success story of high prices and rapid growth resulted precisely from such surface effects. "I'm a marketing expert, a consultant to many multinational companies" she said, "and I tell you that I can achieve the same prices and growth rate with *any* trash bin." Vipp executives would dispute this; their Marketing Vice-President, Kasper Egelund, told us "The customer is not stupid...it doesn't matter how much marketing you put into a bad product." It's a lot to swallow (and cynical besides) to argue that such disingenuousness works easily and in the long run. Maybe it does, but we doubt it.

Also, the idea that the distinction between art and not-art relies on the intentions of the maker has other problems. Artist's intentions are notoriously hard to discover. Sometimes an artist leaves a record. We know that when Michelangelo painted in the Sistine Chapel he felt insulted about being left the ceiling to paint (rather than the walls), wanted badly to get back to his real art (sculpture), and did his best to insult Pope Julius II, with whom he battled constantly about subject matter. Some art experts believe that the bare ass in "The Creation of the Sun and the Moon" gestures obscenely toward Pope Julius.<sup>16</sup> Unworthy motives have not infrequently produced great works of art. What we know about Julius II attests to this; *Il Papa Terribile* ("The Terrible Pope") was as crass a man as ever held that post (a tough competition), forever angling to get his family's colors and crest into religious works of art.<sup>17</sup> But he holds an honored place in history as the patron of some of the world's greatest artistic achievements.

But distrust of a maker's intentions about how art is being "used" deserves more probing and a lot more thought. The ways that commerce might harm art go beyond mere concerns about disingenuous intentions. And so we arrive at the third fallacy...

### **Fallacy #3: Commerce Dominates and Corrupts Art, and Subverts its Purpose**

---

<sup>16</sup> These details come from an official Vatican tour guide, during a tour on December 31, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Blech, B and Doliner, R. (2008). *The Sistine Secrets*, New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers. p. 106.

Some people make a simple distinction between art and not art: if it makes a lot of money it's not art. In part because of his immense wealth and popularity, the painter Andrew Wyeth drew this reaction from critics who "dismissed his most famous painting, 'Christina's World,' as a 'mandatory dorm room poster.'"<sup>18</sup> William Blake said, "Where any view of money exists, art cannot be carried on."<sup>19</sup> Commercial art is an oxymoron. This formulation certainly makes things simple. Commerce harms art, so if we care about art we'll keep the two things safely distant from each other. Let's consider the ways in which this might be true, beginning with the innocuous and working forward to the sinister.

Commerce might draw the artist away from her or his art work. This certainly does happen. In our own research, we interviewed Colleen Lynch, a metal sculptor of international reputation, whose important works are often highly conceptual and challenging for audiences, hence not very commercial. They don't fly off the shelves, though they go for high prices when they do sell. Like many artists, she doesn't like to sell her best pieces, so she doesn't work all that hard to move them. Consequently, Ms. Lynch devotes some of her time and metalworking skill to making jewelry that sells well, steadily, and in some volume. Ms. Lynch will tell you that she regrets time spent on jewelry, but it's how she makes her living. Another artist we've interviewed, painter Ted Michener, is a real estate entrepreneur who owns and operates restaurants, an endeavor that takes a lot of time away from his painting. We imagine that more artists have day jobs than don't, in North America at least.<sup>20</sup>

Of course it's too bad if a poet has to spend time grading papers when he or she could be writing. But sometimes it's a good thing for an artist to be drawn aside. We've mentioned the ceiling of Sistine Chapel: Michelangelo believed his true calling was sculpture and hotly resented

---

<sup>18</sup> Larry Rohter reported this appraisal in a *New York Times* appreciation of Wyeth on his death, 16 January 2009. Wyeth sold "Christina's World" to the Museum of Modern Art for \$1800 in 1948. About a year's pay for a low-level government employee.

<sup>19</sup> Damon, S. F., Eaves, M. (1988), *A Blake dictionary: the ideas and symbols of William Blake*, UPNE, p. 28.

<sup>20</sup> In *Martin Eden*, Jack London tells the story (his own) of a writer nearly defeated by the need to eat and pay rent. In some European countries in recent decades, the need for a day job for some artists has been somewhere diminished by government support for art and artists.

this assignment. The time management issues, though a source of regret for many artists, don't seem to keep great work from happening. William Carlos Williams (physician) and Wallace Stevens (insurance executive) wrote plenty of great poetry. We can't know what effect an artist's life has on the work. Artists have a way of co-opting difficulty, of turning it to advantage.

There is always the Emily Dickinson approach; she withdrew into seclusion in her home to do her greatest work, and most of poetry remained unknown until it was discovered after her death (talk about putting some space between yourself and commerce!). But this doesn't seem like a requirement for great art. Rather, it seems like a difficulty to be managed by artists, a reality to face and guide to a workable outcome. As long an artist can "have money and a room of her own" as Virginia Woolf famously put it, great art can be possible.<sup>21</sup> But there are other, more significant, sources of worry about the interference of commerce with art for us to consider.

"Selling out," for instance. The artist, tasting commercial success or hungry for it, makes choices that harm the art. Most people probably can think of examples of bad art caused by attempts to make something people would buy. Neil Simon, amazingly skilled at play *wrighting*, disappoints some theatre artists and drama aficionados when he has a character deliver a gag instead of the more artful (but less funny) moment his plotting skill has set up. Some people like the gags; it's what they remember about the work. It's very likely, we must admit, that art loses here. Tolstoy claimed that bad art never hurt anyone, but it *can* drive out good art. It can draw resources and audiences, and the time of artists, away from good art, and there's more than enough bad art in the world to make trouble for artists.

Concerns about selling out are not new. Pierre Guillet de Monthoux, in his excellent book *The Art Firm*, describes how Friedrich Nietzsche, who idolized Richard Wagner, turned against him upon seeing how much Wagner enjoyed commercial success, and how eager he seemed for more of it. "The more Nietzsche discovered the calculating backstage technician in Wagner, the

---

<sup>21</sup> Virginia Woolf has pointed out artfully that the duties of motherhood and the station of women for much of history prevented them from spending time on pursuits such as the arts.

more he hated him,” writes Guillet de Monthoux<sup>22</sup> One could debate whether the art suffered, but that didn’t seem to be the point for Nietzsche, who felt betrayed by Wagner’s willingness to fix his attention on anything but the highest aesthetic aims.

Some artists are “corrupted” in this way, others are not. In early 1959, at the tender age of 32, trumpet player and band leader Miles Davis stood atop the jazz world, having gained critical and commercial success, big record deals, and a reputation as possibly the coolest dude in the known universe. To turn from artistic exploration toward monetary exploitation of his current fame was a readily available option. Davis chose to continue exploring, to turn the page on bebop, the jazz form that had delivered him to the top, and introduce “modal jazz.” Modal jazz also succeeded commercially, most obviously in *Kind of Blue* (1959), the most commercially successful jazz album of all time, but not right away. Sometimes his experiments got a less than enthusiastic reception. He continued experimenting anyway, even after modal jazz caught on.<sup>23</sup> Pablo Picasso had similar inclinations. Davis and Picasso chose to keep serving their muses, and demonstrated a willingness to endure criticism from disappointed fans.

In the end, though, if we are to disapprove of selling out, if we are to feel angry about it, toward whom or what should we express these feelings? “Selling out” is a matter of *artist* behavior. It’s a choice. Feel, along with Nietzsche, betrayed if you wish, but can we really criticize artists for wanting to move up Maslow’s hierarchy just as readily as an accountant might? And, as we’ve already noted, sometimes lower motivations *do* lead to great art (Pope Julius II paid Michelangelo to do as he was told). We’ve also seen plenty of bad art (some of it *really* bad) motivated honorably, caused by attempts to do good in the world, to promote a worthy cause, to demonstrate a thesis, to improve or humanize business management, or even to expose the benighted to high culture. The didactic urge, the desire to “say something” with art, especially something political, has likely undone many more artists than commercial influence has; Harold

---

<sup>22</sup> *The Art Firm: Aesthetic Management and Metaphysical Marketing, from Wagner to Wilson*, Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> For more on Miles Davis and *Kind of Blue*, see Austin, Robert D. And Carl Stormer, “Miles Davis: *Kind of Blue*, (2008), Harvard Business School case number 609-050, Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing.

Pinter, who made his reputation writing plays that pointedly refused to meet people's expectations about saying something, late in his life became so roused to express his political views that many people think he sold out to politics and ruined his work from that period. It's difficult to say whether commercial selling out hurts art, finally, and as we've said, it would be difficult to find a legitimate basis for criticizing the primary instigators of the practice (artists themselves). But perhaps we could direct ire toward the forces that tempt artists to sell out? To the forces that more or less make them do it?

Some forms of domination or corruption of art by commerce don't have much to do with artists' free choices. We've already touched upon these, what you might call the *coercive* or even *mercenary* influences on art and artists that sometimes accompany commerce. Sometimes it's not the artist's choice to go for a short-term quick score, as it is when he or she sells out. Sometimes the artist is made to do it. We suspect it's these possibilities that bother Mintzberg and the angry artist more than any others. Such concerns occupy many who research the relationship between art and business. Eikhof and Haunschild, for example, distinguish between artistic logics and economic logics, and assert that "economic logics tend to crowd out artistic logics and thus endanger the resources vital to creative production."<sup>24</sup> They describe how this happens in Germany's publically funded theatres, despite steps taken to insulate these institutions from such pressures with an officially implemented policy of *Kunstfreiheit* or "freedom of art" from in-aesthetic influence.

This peril can materialize in different ways. In the story told by Eikhof and Haunschild, it arrives in a sequence of small steps, compromises and moments of weakness, collective choice made by some and imposed on others. This may be the danger the angry Aacorn poster dreads, the real damage done when art gradually comes to *justify* itself in commercial terms. Such a process is broad enough to manifest in ways we think worried Mintzberg. Business managers, in

---

<sup>24</sup> Eikhof, D. R. and A. Haunschild, "For Art's Sake! Artistic and Economic Logics in Creative Production," (2007), *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 28, p. 523-538.

control of artists' livelihoods, may compel them to use their artistic gifts for evil not good, to fool customers into parting with too much of their money.

We concede the legitimacy of these worries, but we also wonder about them. How strongly established is the tendency for economic logics to crowd out artistic ones? Must it be this way? Concerning the human tendency toward short-term thinking, the easy score, the shortcut: Is this ever really the best way forward, even in business? And concerning the mercenary uses of art: How well does that really work? For how long can it fool the customers?

We propose that much can be gained merely by being more careful in considering questions like these, more careful in separating out the specific ways in which artistic and commercial interests interact. They need not always pull in different directions. Vipp, we submit, displays the possibility of achieving an integrated form of artistic and commercial success. And when these interests do pull in different directions, it might be possible to manage the tension. Let's see if we can make this suggestion more persuasive...

### **Artistic Ambitions and Practical Considerations**

A work of art has, first and foremost, artistic objectives. These should be primary, no doubt. But no artist completely escapes the constraints of practicality. We have one area of modest expertise in art, the theatre. For a theatre, cries the innocent enthusiast, you need only "two boards and a passion." The seasoned professional knows better. If you want to put on a play, you'll soon find out that you need to hire a union board wrangler. John Jory (founder of the Actors' Theatre of Louisville) told us once, "First thing you do to start a theatre is find someone who can read the building code." If you want people to come see your play you'll need a stage of some kind, preferably in a building out of the weather; you'll want chairs, scenery, costumes, and properties. And so on.

Other art forms share similar concerns. If nothing else does, the practical properties of materials constrain the artist's expression. You can paint over something you don't like with oils,

but not with watercolors. The marks a print maker puts in a copper plate can't be unput. A glass artist who makes an adjustment to an emerging form too late, after the glass has become too cool, shatters it to dust. A playwright needn't write stage directions that call for tiny gestures—the audience just won't see them and the actors won't use them.<sup>25</sup> Practicalities always enter into art.

And commercial concerns are a kind of practicality. Ultimately, in a theatre, you can't get along without a box office and a marketing/PR department. If you want to put on a second play, you'll have to sell tickets enough to this one to fund it. You sell tickets to a play in much the same way that you sell many other things: You offer a product that people want to pay for.

At the People's Light and Theatre, a LORT D regional theatre<sup>26</sup> where we work and study, the artistic director chooses plays in discussion with artists, designers, the budget director, the development office, and the managing director. Telemarketers, house management, and box office all read the scripts and put in their two cents' worth. The artists design, build, and rehearse the plays with a view to making the best possible artwork out of available materials. A belief that good work will reach its audience informs rehearsals. The artists routinely make guesses about what their audiences will want and need: Actors must speak loudly enough, even in the most intimate exchanges, to be heard by spectators up to 80 feet away; the scenery mustn't wobble distractingly when a door slams; the phone needs to stop ringing when the actor answers it; there should be light on faces even in the night scenes. Does such attention to such practicalities corrupt the work? Of course not. They're necessary features of the theatre art. No less interesting, exciting, even glorious, than the histrionic exchanges that move actors and audience to laughter and tears.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> The novelist Henry James failed as a playwright; a famous stage direction he wrote shows why: They enter, looking as if they had just had tea.

<sup>26</sup> LORT is the League of Resident Theatres, the association that negotiates with theatre unions. D refers to the minimum salary the theatre must pay union actors. People's Light operates on a 5+ million dollar annual budget, producing a schedule of 6 to 8 plays a year in two theatres on a five acre campus of offices, shops, a bistro, a function room, and locally famous gardens.

<sup>27</sup> Every now and then there's an attempt to create a theatre uncontaminated by commercial concerns like ticket sales or expensive real estate. William Butler Yeats did that alongside of his more conventional theatre. We know about the Abbey Theatre of Dublin, they come to New York now and then, a hundred or so years after the founding;

Jonas Hecksher, creative director at the design firm e-Types, has been known to resist showing a client a design he thought they might like, a design that might make the firm money, because he considered the design "not good enough" aesthetically. On the other hand, he also told us in a research interview, "I am not doing the jobs for me, I am doing them for my clients...I work for a client."<sup>28</sup> These sentiments need not be inconsistent. Designers' concern for art objectives in their work doesn't keep them from working within important practical constraints, including what customers want or need; indeed, such practical constraints are a welcome part of the challenge. Hecksher explained it to us as he described once designing a beer bottle: "Technical things come in, like the weight of the box of 24 bottles has to be standard to make costs cheaper; so we had to make the neck shorter and thinner to make the cost of making and sending it out right...We lost some of the beauty of the design making that change, but it's okay, it's part of the process."<sup>29</sup>

The staff of People's Light, Jonas Hecksher, and many other accomplished artists don't resist practical considerations, nor do they lack concern for the taste of their audiences. But at the same time, their desire to make a thing of aesthetic value leads them to resist the easy score. In their concern about the interaction of art and business, they are careful and specific. They don't deny practicalities or resist the importance of commerce. They don't hate commerce, they hate short-term thinking, and many of them, especially businesses like design or theatre, believe that art and commercial objectives can be aligned, especially in the long run.

Artists inevitably, whether they admit it or not, serve two masters, one artistic and the other practical; they work against two scales of value.<sup>30</sup> The managing director of e-Types, Søren

---

no one but college students (who sometimes have to read the scripts) has heard of Yeat's living room productions attended by a few of the elect.

<sup>28</sup> Austin, R. D., O'Donnell, S. and S. K. Friis, "e-Types A/S," Harvard Business School Case 606-118 (2006),.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> At least two scales. Art works often reach for value on different scales. Christo's Gates in NYC created an event of social and community value; a stained glass window maker may seek to honor God—and there are other "values" artists might aim for. Our diagram is based in part on our Aristotelian inclinations to regard aesthetic value as separate and intrinsic. We do not mean to presume what motivates artists, or what values they seek.

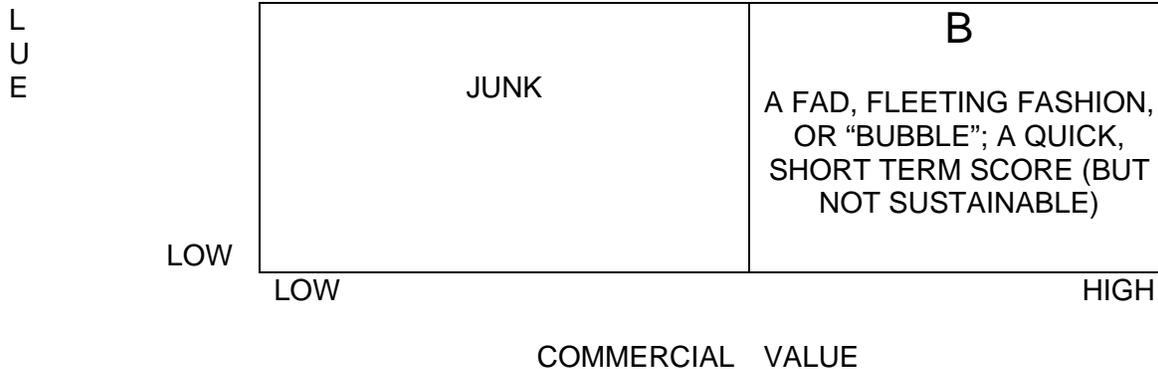
Overgaard, told us: “We have two different currencies in this firm. We have money, cash flow...and then we have prestige/street respect/doing something great.”<sup>31</sup> The company’s designers understand the need for both currencies, even if their primary job is to work toward a non-commercial objective. They know they need to have an *aesthetic* sense of what “better” means. When the aesthetic sense of better seems not to line up with the commercial sense of better, as when a customer seems to be asking for something aesthetically inferior, designers consider it their job to demand consideration of the long term, time during which customer sensibilities might evolve. They believe commercial value available in this long term almost always exceeds that of a flash-in-the-pan score.

The figure (below) describes a way of conceptualizing this dynamic. In a company like e-Types, designers work to assure value on the vertical “artistic value” scale. Managers work to assure value on the horizontal “commercial value” scale.” If both do a great job, we end up in quadrant A, with an outcome that has both artistic and commercial value, an outcome to celebrate. Vipp, when successful, operates in this quadrant; so do Apple, BMW, and a host of other firms with high aesthetic standards. So do managers who, as we suggested in our Aacorn message, understand and appreciate the role art can play in business. What has Mintzberg and the angry Aacorn poster upset, then? What problem could they have with operating in quadrant A?

A R T I S T I C  V A L U E	HIGH	<b>C</b>  A POORLY MARKETED WORK OF ART	<b>A</b>  AN ENDURING CLASSIC, A WORK OF ART WITH ENDURING COMMERCIAL VALUE

We mean in our diagram only to point out the independence of whatever aesthetic objective the artist might pursue from the commercial objectives.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.



The answer, we suspect, is that they are thinking not about quadrant A, but about quadrant B. Mintzberg thinks Vipp is in quadrant B (we think he's wrong, as we've explained); the angry Aacorn poster dislikes the drawing away of audience and resources from good art that quadrant B represents. Such vexation is well placed. We can all think of businesses that go for the shortcut, the fleeting fad, the easy score. Think of the three times removed copycat of *American Idol* or the 19<sup>th</sup> TV reality show you've heard about this year. Have you noticed how, post-Harry Potter, kids' books all seem to be about sorcery? Some marketing departments seem designed primarily to seize upon one fad after another, a business model that appears to work, at least some of the time. You can probably even name artists who do this; artists who create sensational rather than aesthetically coherent works.<sup>32</sup>

So if Mintzberg and the angry Aacorn poster are antagonized about quadrant B, they should be. But quadrant B is not the biggest problem. There are two big problems, really. Both derive from the way quadrant B can become an obsession for people who love the arts. To put it simply: People get so obsessed with the awfulness of outcomes in quadrant B that they can't

---

<sup>32</sup> Often enough critics and lay people alike make this distinction as a matter of personal preference, of taste. Critical response to Andrew Wyeth (already noted) clearly displays this, as does theatre production. A playwright (say Shakespeare, Ibsen, or Chekhov) dominates the market then fades away. After a certain while, the scripts again enter production as part of the standard repertory. The very long term has a way of shaping taste, gradually wearing away everything but the internal principles of organization that make the work what it is. We produce Shakespeare, Ibsen, and Chekhov routinely; we'll know about Wyeth and Tennessee Williams in a hundred years or so.

appreciate outcomes in quadrant A. Vipp deserves some credit from the esteemed professor. That's the first big problem.

The second, more serious, big problem has to do with quadrant C. We haven't paid much attention to quadrant C yet, but it really deserves the bulk of our attention. Quadrant C is the quadrant of under-appreciated art and artists. Art without much commercial value.

Not too long ago, we had a chance to observe the production of a jazz recording. Some of the world's best players, mostly from New York City, assembled in a studio in Norway. Watching the artist at work, seeing the program come together was exhilarating and educational. We also had a chance to interact casually with these superb musicians during the in-between times, over a cup of coffee or while eating lunch. During one such interlude, the subject of pay came up, and we were startled to hear how little money had been sufficient to draw the best jazz artists in the world across an ocean for three days of work. It was an amount well south of the daily billing rate of the most junior IT consultant we know.

How can this be? How can the best jazz artists in the world earn so little? Might this be the work of coercive commercial powers?

Possibly, at least to some extent, in the case of musicians. Big companies do have a lock on distribution. Or anyway, they have had (things are getting a lot more interesting, distribution-wise, in the age of the Internet and iTunes). But the real the problem here, we suggest, is not with the *operation* of commerce but with its *failure to operate*, or with its failure to operate with adequate sophistication. Something has gone wrong with the market for jazz musicians when such musicians this good get paid this badly. Richard E. Caves, economist and author of *Creative Industries: Contracts Between Art and Commerce*, argues that artists get paid poorly because they will do their work anyway. An inner drive makes artists grateful for the opportunity to work, so you can get by without paying them much.<sup>33</sup> He also notes, however, that artists considered

---

<sup>33</sup> Plenty of examples come to mind. Young actors routinely delay joining Actors' Equity because mandated union wages might prevent them from playing interesting parts. David Strathairn, an Academy Award nominee, often acts in

sufficiently differentiated should see their commercial value bid up.<sup>34</sup> The question is, why not these jazz players? And why not more artists?

This isn't an art problem. It's commerce problem, a problem of markets failing to operate in a way that values these products and services appropriately. A better form of *marketing* might be able to address these failures. After all, such difficulties afflict many things sold commercially, not just aesthetic "products." Customers generally need to know about the thing they're supposed to want; often sellers need to tell them, explain the value proposition, show people how it can help them. The consuming public needs to be related to, communicated to, sometimes even educated. Under-appreciation of an outcome, of a value proposition, happens in business with some frequency, as it did famously at Xerox in the early 1970s. Their Palo Alto Research Center (PARC) invented the future of the computer industry, but few people at the company understood that, and customers never had a chance to appreciate products that Xerox never brought to market. Other companies now own and sell this future; they benefit commercially from PARC's neglected innovations.<sup>35</sup>

Of course an idea can be so novel, so far ahead of its time, that even the best marketing can't completely solve the problem. But better business practices, including marketing, might be able to help. Also, the problem with art products is not identical to the Xerox PARC problem. Art products have special qualities, aesthetic ones. The important point, however, is this: We do have examples of people and companies who seem to know how to integrate aesthetic and commercial concerns. There are important things business can learn from these people and companies, and important benefits that can come to art and artists if this happens. But it won't happen if we're too busy disapproving of quadrant B to learn more about quadrant A.

---

regional theatres for scale (the lowest possible wage) in order to play parts he couldn't do otherwise. The work is valuable to him for its own sake.

<sup>34</sup> *Creative Industries: Contracts between Art and Commerce*, (2000), Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

<sup>35</sup> See: Michael Hitzik's *Dealers of Lightning: Xerox PARC and the Dawn of the Computer Age*, (2000), New York: Collins Business; or see the more provocatively and descriptively titled *Fumbling the Future: How Xerox Invented, then Ignored, the First Computer*, by Douglas K. Smith and Robert C. Alexander, (1999), iUniverse.

Art often doesn't get marketed effectively by artists for an understandable reason: Most artists want to do art, not business. Even when marketers are around and interested, the difficulty to be managed, the transition from "good" art to "commercially valuable" art, remains formidable. It's a difficulty that isn't always successfully managed even with much more commercially conceived products and services. To make progress on the difficulty, artists and business people need to acknowledge and reduce the obstacles between them. Regardless of how this might be accomplished, the challenge remains one of adding more commerce to the world of art, not less—of placing commerce and art in closer juxtaposition.

The real problem for art and artists that the attitudes of Mintzberg and the angry Aacorn correspondent, and many others with similar attitudes and ideas, help keep in place is that *obsession with quadrant B often keeps artists stuck in quadrant C*. Artists react so violently to the cheap score that they want nothing to do with the marketing that might move them from quadrant C to quadrant A. They throw a baby out with the bath. Too many discussions of art and commerce, whether by artists or management researchers, miss (or avoid) a distinction between good art well marketed (quadrant A) and junk well marketed (quadrant B). Many good artists, fearing to discredit their art through some kind of guilt by association, reject any help that takes into account commercial considerations. They see only quadrant C versus quadrant B, as if quadrant A didn't exist.

This perspective has several unintended consequences, none of them good for art or artists. It keeps art "fluffy" and indulgent (Fallacy #1) because it resists placing commercial value on it. Commercial value does not rule out artistic value, of course; but refusal to acknowledge commercial value in art unnecessarily diminishes its importance from some narrow (and, too often, resource-controlling) viewpoints. The C versus B perspective fuels assertions that this or that isn't art (Fallacy #2), because such assertions, usually based in personal taste, help artists distance the outcomes of their work from the threat that they believe commercial success poses to their artistic credibility. These assertions, in turn, sustain Fallacy #3, supporting the fiction that

commerce always dominates or subverts art and assuring that we'll endlessly and indignantly argue the false dichotomy of quadrant C versus quadrant B, shifting attention from quadrant A, which we should celebrate. In a highly regarded study of the Danish furniture industry, Per H. Hansen argues that shrewd marketing, perhaps more than inherent beauty, explains the success of the "Danish Modern" style of furniture.<sup>36</sup> This may be, but we don't have to choose. We can market good art or design well. We can integrate art and commerce in ways that will enhance the value of both. We have examples to learn from. Good art and dedicated artists (and designers, theatre people, etc.) deserve nothing less.

### **A Better World**

If we want our culture to recognize art as valuable, we need to develop an economy in which the intrinsic virtues of a work of art can have extrinsic, even commercial value. People placing value on beauty and paying for art things is a good thing. If our culture is art deficient, some of the blame could be laid on the "art for art's sake" idea, and on the rarified atmosphere that even some artists and art patrons cultivate. When artists embrace the idea that only a certain few, an elite, can make, understand, or appreciate art, or that art should never be judged on the same scales of value used for non-art things, they cut themselves off from the world we all live in. And it's unnecessary. Art can be valued in many ways.

In his novel, *1984*, George Orwell imagined a dystopia in which the rulers systematically removed all sources of aesthetic pleasure, and criminalized any but the most trivial kinds of enjoyment. This rendered the demoralized populace easy to control, as they had nothing to stimulate or satisfy their more creative energies. We're a long way from that, but our culture does sometimes see danger in personal expression, especially in making or enjoying art. Plato was only

---

<sup>36</sup> "Networks, Narratives, and New Markets: The Rise and Decline of Danish Modern Furniture Design, 1930-1970," (2006), *Business History Review*, Vol. 80, pp. 449-483.

the first political thinker to recognize the threat art poses to an orderly society.<sup>37</sup> Molière was nearly killed in the kerfuffle over his play, *Tartuffe*; and not even his friend Louis XIV could get him buried in the churchyard. The WPA had no end of trouble about the arts projects they financed during the depression. And Mayor Giuliani unhesitatingly broke the law in order to suppress some rowdy art on exhibit in Brooklyn. These examples, and untold others like them, provide evidence both of the extrinsic reach of art, and of our failure to integrate intrinsic and extrinsic values when it comes to art.

Let's circle back around to that better world Professor Mintzberg wants to bring about to offer some guesses about how it might look. How about this: Good art achieves appropriate commercial value consistently, not just occasionally. A conversation takes place when art and commerce are in tension, a conversation in which neither artist nor managers dominates.<sup>38</sup> Excellence in art and marketing operate side-by-side, within well-integrated and sophisticated commercial practices. Companies pursue enduring value, rather than short cuts and cheap scores achieved by surface effects, and skillful marketers help customers learn to tell the difference. There are more marketing departments like the one at Vipp, more companies like Vipp, and more products like their trash bins and toilet brushes. In this better world, consumers "just love" the things they buy, have long term relationships with their chosen functional art objects, and chose to repair their treasured things rather than pitch them into landfills. Management researchers lavish attention on companies like Vipp and on other activity in what we have called quadrant A.

Our favorite domain for work and study in art offers, we believe, a good example of art's proper place in a commercial enterprise. At every step in its construction a play mingles making and marketing; the emerging object, a play, connects increasingly with a world extrinsic to it. Opening night, only the most obvious of those connections, dominates everyone's thinking: the play *will* be ready on Friday at 8pm. Artists whose work doesn't require public performance can

---

<sup>37</sup> Dissanayake has plenty to say about the biological sources of art's power, as do the scientists currently at work researching mirror neurons.

<sup>38</sup> Such conversations do happen. See Austin, Robert D. and Daniel Hjorth, "The Unlikely Conversation: How the Economic 'lives with' the Aesthetic in Design Companies," working paper, Copenhagen Business School.

successfully ignore such connections, but they do so at their peril. That kind of denial, of course, militates against getting paid.

When good art fails to command high prices that represents a failure, not of art, but of commerce. When we object to a high price for art or a designer trash bin, that obstructs progress toward a better world that features experts and expertise not just in art, not just in business, but also in making more people aware and accepting of their need for art, and the legitimacy of that need. Commercially valued art will fund a chain that makes artists financially well, and why shouldn't they be? Object instead to the cheap score, the slick commercialization of something that doesn't exhibit the aesthetic coherence of art, which is inauthentic because it claims to be art, or good art, when the claim is neither earnest nor accurate. Maybe Professor Mintzberg felt this way about the Vipp bin; we urge him to experience the company and its products, then decide.

Our culture has many flaws, one of them, perhaps, the movement of art away from the center of life. But we change things by reconceiving, by including *what is* in a larger conception of *what can be*. The supposed malign influence of commerce on art will not go away because marginalized artists cry "How dare you!" or when people object to high values placed on art outcomes. It *will* go away when artists and non-artists find ways to include *what is* in their worldviews, and to combine *what is* with a view that includes art understood and valued in many different ways.

In a better world, art will command fair prices, best-in-the-world jazz musicians will make as much as partners in consulting firms, and jobs up and down the value chain around such activities will pay a living wage. To fulfill the vision of art as a humanizing force in the world, we need to make the market for art work better, not separate the art world from markets and commercial value.

As for the practical steps that would bring a better world into being? A complete answer to this question would require much more space than we have here. We can work to undermine the three fallacies we've identified; to carry on a more careful and less emotional conversation

about the tensions between art and business; to overcome a general aversion to business that's all too common among artists and their patrons; and to develop better theories about how art and commerce can achieve integration helpful to both.

Samuel Johnson once wrote: "No man but a blockhead ever wrote except for money."<sup>39</sup> Robert Hughes added, "The idea that money, patronage, and trade automatically corrupt the wells of imagination is a pious fiction, believed by some Utopian lefties and a few people of genius like Blake, but flatly contradicted by history itself." It *is* okay for artists to make money. "On the whole," says Hughes, "money does artists much more good than harm."<sup>40</sup> We wish for more of them to have more of it more often. In the end, that should allow more people able to make art, and more people to enjoy its salutary powers. And what could be wrong with that—really?

---

<sup>39</sup> Quoted by Robert Hughes in "Art & Money," *New Art Examiner*, October and November, 1984. <http://members.shaw.ca/competitivenessofnations/Anno%20Hughes%20Art%20&%20Money.htm>, accessed 20 November 2008.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*