PO POMO: THE POST POSTMODERN CONDITION

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in Art and Museum Studies

By

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Washington D.C.
April 27, 2009
The research and writing of this thesis is dedicated to my parents, Catherine Hagner, Lisa McKee and the semester abroad crew (TWICE!). Thank you for your patience and unfailing support.

With gratitude,
Paula B. Hartness
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INTRODUCTION: MODERNISM, POSTMODERNISM, AND PO POMO

Over the past twenty years, Postmodernism has become an aggrandized version of itself. The landscape of the artworld is bigger than ever before. We see bigger artworks, bigger artists, and bigger prices in a time when less attention is paid to what makes artworks innovative and unique, and more attention is paid to an artwork that has earned top dollar and to the way artists have marketed themselves. The fact that the artworld has shifted into a new movement can no longer be defined clearly by the word Postmodernism. Perhaps the best term for such a movement might be Post Postmodernism, or Po PoMo. Post Postmodernism is a term that first began being used in the 1990s to distinguish artistic practice from that of Postmodernism. While there have been few academic attempts to define and characterize how Post Postmodernism differs from the preceding art movement, theorists and academics have begun to trace the evolution of Post Postmodernism in areas such as, architecture, poetry, and culture.¹ While the artwork from the past twenty years and many of the artists

¹ “Postmodernism,” Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, 31 March 2009, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post-postmodernism>. As a brief side note, it seems ironic that the most succinct and well thought out definition of Post Postmodernism that can be found on the Internet is found on Wikipedia, the website that is a collaborative effort to create a free, online encyclopedia. Anyone can edit and add information. Also, it is a real time encyclopedia. As references within our culture expand, so too do the article entries on Wikipedia. You can find pertinent information about World War II as well as detailed information about every season of American Idol; it all depends on where a person’s interests lie. A detailed list of scholarly readings and information about Post Postmodernism can be found at <http://www.metapedia.com/wiki/index.php?title=Main_Page> a website directed and published by Dr. Martin Irvine a professor of
who have garnered attention from the public and critics still adhere to the qualities of the Postmodernist art movement they continue to push to the extreme the boundaries of idea, theory and in many cases taste. There is no clear break between Postmodernism and Po PoMo, making a declaration of evolution difficult to exemplify and even more treacherous to describe. This is a shift where no consensus has been reached. Mark C. Taylor states:

For some, our era is marked by a shift from industrialism to postindustrialism; for others, by the movement from modernism to postmodernism or from a culture of production to a culture of reproduction; and for still others, by the change from market capitalism to multinational, informational, or digital capitalism.²

However, there are six major distinctions that set this new, dynamic art movement apart from Postmodernism: the rise of art as commodity and artist stars, a focus on galleries, globalization and an increased dissemination of information, a focus on intermedial artistic practices, the overwhelming meta-mentality of artists, and a reemergence of traditional painting and photography.

To understand the emergence of Po PoMo, it is necessary to explore the reasoning behind the break between Modernism and Postmodernism, as many of the characteristics of Postmodernism have continued into Post Postmodernism.

There is still discussion on if there was a break between Modernism and

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Postmodernism as stated in the theories of Clement Greenberg, Jean-François Lyotard, and Fredric Jameson. These critics maintain that Postmodernism is only another incarnation of Modernist art. However, there are distinct stylistic and theoretical differences between these two artistic movements. “But whether the relationship is defined as parasitic, cannibalistic, symbiotic or revolutionary, one thing is clear: you cannot have postmodernism without modernism.”\(^3\)

One of the most important factors that contributed to the break between Modernism and Postmodernism was the tumultuous socio-political period during the 1960s and 1970s. While several Modernist movements such as Dadaism and Futurism emerged from some measure of political unrest the circumstances surrounding the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s undeniably affected artistic production. The activism of the 1960s was international, and a new social consciousness derived from the eruption of outrage over the Vietnam War, especially in the United States, France, and Britain. The 1960s and 1970s was a time of radicalism, with the counterculture reaching out and fighting against all forms of injustice and demanding action. Bra burnings, race riots, and war protests filled the airwaves and influenced everyone who came into contact with this youthful agitation. The 1950s seemed benign typified by the nuclear family, peace, and prosperity. Yet boiling under the surface was an explosion of activity

and mobilization. By using art subversively or blatantly to address these issues, politics became primary source of artistic inspiration. Such postmodern artists as Hans Haacke, used their art as a platform to voice their opinions about politics and societal injustices. For example, Haacke underlined some of the more unsavory practices of monetary donors to art museum exhibitions, and Martha Rosler voiced her frustration over the Vietnam war by juxtaposing the photographs of Vietnam victims with the sleek and peaceful domestic interiors of the American home found on the same pages of *Life* magazine.

Feeding the distinction between Modernism and Postmodernism was the artistic use of low art or popular culture—what Clement Greenberg referred to as *kitsch*—and successfully raising it to the status of high art. Referencing popular culture allowed artists to incorporate many different components within their work. Instead of kitsch representing the end of culture, it became the definition of culture and was most effectively used by such Pop artists as Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Richard Hamilton, and Claes Oldenburg. Kitsch became a dominant mode of representation for almost all of the smaller art movements that came collectively to construct Postmodern art.

The break between Modernism and Postmodernism was furthered by the rejection of the metanarratives, a kind of universal truth, so forcefully advocated by art critics during the early to mid-twentieth century. The idea that Abstract
Expressionism was the culmination of artistic production, of artistic genius, fell out of fashion. Along with the refusal of the prevailing practices of the avant-garde and a push to make the art of the present, Postmodern artists looked to create the art of the future. Artists embraced media that were new, odd, and exciting like video, performance, photography and installation and took inspiration from such technology-heavy events as the Space Race. Artists also began using their own experiences and bodies to project and connect with their audience on a visceral level. Accordingly, self-documentary video art and photography developed as viable forms of expression. As many artists only performed certain works once, often as *Happenings*, the recording of the work was of utmost importance, so that the work could be explored and shared with a wider and more varied audience at a later date.

Postmodernist artists made use of their differences to make art that explored ideas of gender, sexual orientation, religion, and culture. Social mores were relaxing, permitting artists a more focused and fresh appraisal of who we are within society and what has shaped people into individuals. The humor, pastiche, irony, and parody within Postmodernism, in essence, seemed more like a crisis of identity than an art movement. There was no consensus on style, and no lack of convoluted descriptors. Arthur C. Danto argued that as an artist or a viewer you must extricate all previous views about art.
The history of art attained that point where it had to turn into its own philosophy. It had gone, as art, as far as it could go. In turning into philosophy, art had come to an end. From now on progress could only be enacted on a level of abstract self-consciousness of the kind which philosophy alone must consist in. If artists wished to participate in this progress, they would have to undertake a study very different from what the art schools could prepare them for. They would have to become philosophers.4

All of these differences between Modernism and Postmodernism are integral parts of Po PoMo, but perhaps one of the greatest influences on this new movement was not an idea or style, but an individual. It is unlikely that even Andy Warhol could have visualized how much influence he would have on how we perceive art today and how artists reference him. The most influential artist of Pop Art, and of several subsequent movements, Warhol was one of the most popular and recognized artists of our time, and his work is the most sought after and sold ever. Undeniably, he was in no way the only artist who contributed to the current state of the artworld, but he is the most cited, and the most closely emulated. Warhol’s observation, “Making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art,” constitutes a prophecy for today.

Pop Art focused on the banality of contemporary, and particularly American, culture. Unlike the paintings of the Abstract Expressionists, Pop compositions deliberately lacked an emotional charge. Pop artists typically used

the mass production techniques of the print media, techniques that survived the transition from their initial careers in the commercial arts. Pop artists believed that they should be as cool and detached as the machines they emulated. They embraced the mundane and presented it with a detached irony, a stance that would help to destroy the barriers between high and low art.

An artist was a machine; everyone would have fifteen minutes of fame; nobody, not even the President, could get a better Coke than the bum on the street. Warhol’s ideology emphasized social fusion and the irascible equality of homogeneity. He engaged with mass consumption and production to manufacture an iconography of consumerism. Warhol commodified the Duchampian idea of taking the banal, repositioning its context and challenging a viewer’s perception of the new object. Warhol’s strategically stacked objects, such as Campbell's soup cans or Coca-Cola bottles, evoked both the neat aisles of a supermarket and mechanized mass production. His images were not just ready-mades, but reproducible and available in "endless profusion." Warhol appropriated the images of cultural icons such as Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, Elizabeth Taylor, and Jackie Kennedy to exemplify how we consume a persona that the media has created for us. Warhol’s subjects were doubly commodities in and of themselves.

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Warhol was the first artist to push through the glass ceiling between fine art and commercial art. He set up a workshop, The Factory, where he employed men and women to fabricate the endless profusion of screenprints for his mass of worshipers. He made movies and music. He carefully maintained a façade of casual disregard for what he did and who he was, when in reality he pined for acceptance and lusted for celebrity. Warhol created his own brand and made it almost impenetrable. It has been twenty years since his death and he is still the number one selling artist in the world. Warhol was the first startist, or superstar artist, and the greatest influence on the generation of artists who comprise the Post Postmodern movement.

This is no longer the Postmodernism of Warhol’s day but a shinier, newer, *simulacrum* of itself. Post Postmodernism exists in an artworld that suffers from multiple personality disorder, one that requires a new generation of philosophers to decipher because traditional art history no longer suffices to explain it. Artists are no longer straightforward but undercut the very object they are representing. Post Postmodernist artists inhabit a society that takes for granted the ideals and ideas of Modernism and Postmodernism. All past artistic practice, theory, and philosophy become a springboard for inspiration, an idea that we will return to throughout this discussion. Hybridity of thought, action, and artistic practice further intensify Post Postmodern work, to the bewilderment of many audiences.
Damien Hirst represents one of the best examples of a Post Postmodern artist. A first rate self-promoter, Hirst has built off of Warhol’s model, further blurring the line between the fine and commercial arts, the high and the low. First gaining attention for Freeze, a show that he curated in 1988, which featured his work and that of some of his Goldsmith’s College classmates, Hirst catapulted to stardom with his driving ambition and willingness to push boundaries. One popular story is told about Hirst, his driving ambition, and the Freeze show. The show was held in the highly industrialized Docklands area of east London. Hirst invited many key players in the London art circle, most notably the director of exhibitions at the Royal Academy, Norman Rosenthal. When Rosenthal told Hirst that he had no idea how to get to the show, Hirst arrived with a taxi to take him there personally.\(^6\)

Damien Hirst’s bypassing of the critics in the promotion of ‘Freeze’ toward popularist mediation and private funding sources was a highly astute move on his part…Hirst’s subsequent success as a media figure has been extraordinary; they love him, and his naughty ways…WE ALL DO!\(^7\)

Hirst has a knack for getting himself noticed, and his brand achieves high prices at gallery and auction sales. Hirst is a prolific artist that does not relegate himself to one medium and weaves throughout his compositions the ideas of

appropriation and art history. From vitrines, to medicine cabinets with pharmaceutical medicines in meticulous order, to his various paintings (spot, spin, and butterfly), Hirst has an over-the-top conceptual style. Take for example his work, *Hymn* (1999, Gagosian Gallery, New York, Fig. 1), which is a monumentally sized bronze replica of the plastic child’s toy used to teach human anatomy or his work *For the Love of God* (2007, Private Collection, Fig. 2), which is a platinum cast of a human skull covered in 8,601 diamonds, including a pink pear shaped diamond located on the forehead. These are extravagant works that reference art historical practice but this can be easily overlooked due to their excessive nature. They can also be placed firmly within the realm of high art for the medium in which they were created (bronze and platinum). *Hymn* references the monumental sculptures of Claes Oldenberg from the 1970s as well as the use of kitsch and *For the Love of God* recalls the *memento mori*, although on a more grandiose and decadent scale. But whether you think Hirst is a contemporary genius or believe that his fame derives from clever titles, he is a darling of Po PoMo.

The most frustrating and perhaps disturbing aspect of Po PoMo is that it is so difficult to distinguish from Postmodernism. This art movement, which began in the mid to late 1980s, is so firmly tied to Postmodernism that it could almost be
mistaken for its twin. Almost. Anatoly Osmolovsky observes that the landscape of this new movement relies upon a remerging model of art revived in the 1980s:

This model contains at least three stereotypes: (1) a claim to innovation which created commodified art in the art market; (2) reliance on the market system of production and redistribution of art as the main determinant of its reliability and, as a consequence, the tendency towards the creation of high quality ‘art products’; and (3) obligatory achievement of museum status as a guarantee of historical worth.8

While the transition between Postmodernism and Po PoMo has been gradual, this was not the case with the schism between Modernism and Postmodernism, where artists, nauseated by metanarratives and artistic genius rebelled against the status quo. There is no definite delineation from Postmodernism to Po PoMo. Many artists who fit nicely into the latter, such as Jeff Koons or Cindy Sherman seem to have a foot in both movements. But Po PoMo is not a selective art movement; anything goes. No outright transformation is necessary, just bigger ideas with bigger pockets to fund.

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LANDSCAPE OF PO POMO

Philosophical Sources of Post Postmodernism

When art internalizes its own history, when it becomes self-conscious of its history as it has come to be in our time, so that its consciousness of its history forms part of its nature, it is perhaps unavoidable that it should turn into philosophy at last. And when it does so, well, in an important sense, art comes to an end.\(^9\)

-Jean François Lyotard, *The Post Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*

This statement seems to sum up much of the Post Postmodern period and how artists choose to represent their work. Referencing theories from Benjamin to Baudrillard, Post Postmodern artists incorporate many elements of the intangible to layer their work to the point that it would seem art is no longer historical but philosophical.

In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, the classic text central to both Postmodernism and Po PoMo, Walter Benjamin discusses how the mass reproduction of images, in particular works of art, has destroyed the unique experience offered by the viewing of an original image. Benjamin writes, “To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose ‘sense of the universal equality of things’ has increased to such a degree that it

extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction.”10 As people become more desirous of the immediacy of objects in their everyday lives and their acceptance of a reproduction, society initiates the decay of the aura. Where an original once had the greatest value, a work of art is no longer made to be unique. By degrading the original work of art, artists endow it with new meaning. They do in reality what Benjamin theorizes about: their reproductions make us reimagine the original in revealing new contexts and terms, creating a new reality from the original with its own aura.

We live in a world of mediated images, a world dominated by mass media and advertisements. It seems no wonder that we struggle to discern reality from fantasy. Images surround us at every juncture, on television, in magazines, on the internet, and there is no way to truly determine the validity of these things. In the spirit of Fredric Jameson11 let us think about an historical movie or period piece, such as Saving Private Ryan, The English Patient, or Gladiator. All of these films were nominated for or won an Oscar, indicative at the least of their success in the popular imagination. As historical narratives, these movies try to simulate the look and feel of an unrecoverable past. From clothing, to cars, to furniture, to

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music, the movies use any means necessary to sell us a reality that never existed in the first place. None of these characters actually lived, even if they are loosely based on real people. If the movies succeed, then they have compelled viewers to suspend their disbelief in the fictional past. Of course, when successful this subterfuge makes Hollywood millions of dollars.

Hollywood productions feed into the idea of the structuralist philosophy of signs and signifiers, a literary concept whose ideas have trickled into artistic production. Essentially, this philosophy tries to identify the relationship between signs and their signifiers, or the meanings of the signs. This idea can best be illustrated by the work, *One and Three Chairs* (1965, Museum of Modern Art, New York, Fig. 3) by the Conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth. Consisting of a folding chair, a photographic reproduction of the folding chair, and a dictionary definition of “chair,” Kosuth’s piece shows the various ways in which we can identify and readily accept all three of these representations as a chair. He illustrates how the connection between the sign and the signified is based on our cultural understanding of a chair. While we might be able to more clearly define and accept the relationship between the actual chair and a photo of it, we still can perceive just as easily the connection between these two representations and the definition or concept. We can question which chair is real within this work and
the answer will always be all of them. Eleanor Heartney, explaining the relationship between the sign and signified states:

...We do not create language from our concrete experience of the world. Rather, it creates us, in the sense that a complex structure of codes, symbols, and conventions precedes us and essentially determines what it is possible for us to do and even think.12

By looking at the relationship between signs and signifiers the belief within a structuralist view is that language is arbitrary. It is personal experience that creates a connection between what we see and what we understand the sign to be and mean. Words have no inherent correlation to the thing they signify in the real world. It is individuals that give words meaning.13

The next generation of theorists, the Poststructuralists, explored the ideas of signs and signifiers further. They posited that there is no actual link between the sign and the signified but only between signifiers. Poststructuralists posit that there is a complex structure of codes that all relate to one another and we who encounter the sign cannot identify these correlations as we could when the signifier was anchored to a sign. Seizing on this idea, Roland Barthes declared the death of the author14 or by extension, the artist. Lacking an authority that can bring

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12 Heartney, Postmodernism, 9.
13 Heartney, Postmodernism, 9.
absolute clarity to a work, it is left to the reader to extrapolate information and meaning based on his own thoughts and experiences.

Muddying the waters are Baudrillard’s notions of simulacra and simulations. In his 1985 essay, “Simulacra and Simulations,” Baudrillard hypothesizes that all of reality has been replaced by signs and symbols of itself. In essence, reality is a simulacrum of itself: a hyperreality. Most simply stated, the reproduction of objects negates their truth to reality. As objects are replicated they become something other than reality. Describing this evolution of original to copy to simulation, Baudrillard stated,

> What society seeks through production, and overproduction, is the restoration of the real which escapes it. That is why contemporary ‘material’ production is itself hyperreal. It retains all the features, the whole discourse of traditional production, but it is nothing more than its scaled-down refraction …Thus the hyperrealism of simulation is expressed everywhere by the real’s striking resemblance to itself.\(^{15}\)

With such reasoning, he characterized the present age as one of hyperreality where the real object has been destroyed or outdated, by the signs of its own existence. In our society, the original lacks real meaning. The simulacrum, as proxy, becomes truth.

The philosophy of Post Postmodernism directly relates to that of Postmodernism. However, since these theories have already been deconstructed,

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Po PoMo artists do not seem to directly integrate into their works the ideas of the decay of the aura, mediated images, or simulacra. Artists working today are living in the era that Postmodern theorists described, making their artwork mediated in and of itself.

*Art as Commodity*

Important to the discussion of Post Postmodernism is the idea of art as commodity. The Western world has become a culture of excess. As our desires grow larger, even uncontrollable, our need for the latest, most expensive, and trendy becomes an overwhelming part of our society. If you are what you drive and where you live then in all actuality you must also be defined by what you put on your walls. If an artist boosts a collector’s social cachet, then he or she will most likely be swept up into the upper echelons of artistic fame. Many collectors or art fund managers do not take into consideration the extreme fickleness of the artworld and that their investments may not produce a favorable return.

Nevertheless, despite the presence of a market, art cannot and should not be considered a commodity in its traditional economic definition. According to Pierre Bourdieu, art specifically falls into the category of cultural capital, or objects that are owned and can be traded as economic capital but hold little to no value unless the owner possesses the ability to recognize their worth, vis-à-vis
cultural knowledge. A work of art gains cultural capital by trading on symbolic value, which is obtained through prestige and success in the artworld, specifically through exhibitions and sales. To explain more clearly, a painting by an artist who has just finished graduate school has little to no symbolic value, therefore no cultural capital. As this artist succeeds by signing with a branded gallery, exhibiting at blue chip museums, and selling art at the more prestigious auction houses, the symbolic value of the artist increases. In the larger economic sense there is little demand for art and there is little relation to the cost of making an artwork to its final price. So it becomes the job of critics and dealers to trade on this symbolic value through reviews and shows, which increase the artist’s cultural capital as people are more willing to trade for their art as a commodity. Bourdieu explains:

The artist who puts her name on a ready-made article and produces an object whose market price is incommensurate with its cost of production is collectively mandated to perform a magic act which would be nothing without the whole tradition leading up to her gesture, and without the universe of celebrants and believers who give it meaning and value in terms of that tradition.  

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Rise of the Artist Star

While artists have always made art in order to make money, there has never been such a proliferation of artists so blatantly using their art as a vehicle for stardom. These artists’ have their origins in Andy Warhol and his obsession with celebrity. This idea of celebrity was taken on and exaggerated, creating the idea of artists marketing themselves as a brand. Such artists as Jeff Koons, Damien Hirst, or Takashi Murakami are not just artists looking to make great art, but artists looking to make top dollar as well. While these artists may seem to have appropriated the Situationist ideal of the spectacle, as James Gaywood points out, this model of celebrity as spectacle falls far short.

The Situationist’s original mandate was to counter corporate urbanist cultural hegemony (capitalism’s anaesthetizing effect upon society through the mediated control of experience) by acts of revolutionary anti-establishmentarianism: to fight ‘spectacle’ with (anti) ‘spectacle.’ However, whereas the original Situationist’s spectacle intended anarchy, the glamorous theatricality of, for instance, Damien Hirst, is hardly subversive, but is, rather, reproductive of his stylised self-image.  

Perhaps the most interesting use of art as commodity may be seen in the recent Murakami retrospective, ©Murakami, presented at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2007) and The Brooklyn Museum of Art (2008). As evidenced by the titular trademark notation, it is about copyright and branding of Murakami himself. Perhaps best known for his special edition Louis Vuitton

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17 Gaywood, “yBa as Critique”, 97.
handbags, Murakami integrated into the midst of the exhibit a retail store purveying all of his Louis Vuitton merchandise. This is Po PoMo Commodity at its best. Art is not just for the wall, you can display it as you walk down the street, a commercial readymade.

For many, buying a work by these artists is a status symbol, similar to that of buying a Bentley or a Mercedes. “In the absence of aesthetic criteria, it is possible and useful to determine the value of works of art on the basis of their profitability.” Artists are marketing themselves effectually, but with this latest incarnation of the artworld, they sidestep the traditional requisite of public recognition to earn their status as an artistic genius. It seems that Duchamp was right: for an artist, the audience is an active participant and their belief in your work is possibly the most important part of the whole process. But where Duchamp was sure that this process took thirty to forty years to accomplish, artists today are capable of bypassing the museum establishment and going straight to the galleries or auctions to fetch high prices for their works. For young artists, it is a battle for dealer representation. Don Thompson states, “Artists who do not find mainstream gallery representation within a year or two of graduation are unlikely

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18 Osmolovsky, “Rejection of Museums”, 645.
ever to achieve high prices, or see their work appear at fairs or auctions or in art magazines.”

There no longer seems to be a connection between the perceived greatness of artists and the prices fetched by their works. “For industrial society to thrive, a sufficient number of people must have the time, money, and desire to consume what they do not necessarily need.” From Duchamp’s perspective that it takes thirty to forty years before an artist’s true value is realized, the prices many artists have already achieved may turn out to be a negative investment in the future. It is interesting to note that by just browsing through art magazines from a decade ago, you will realize that few of those galleries still exist, and that few of the artists sold at Christie’s or Sotheby’s are still active in the market.

[Post] Postmodernity’s (dis)organizing terminology has not been exempt from commodification. As a philosophical deviation espousing the language of fashion, capitalism, and image, the commercial motivations manifesting this mediated culture have engendered an image-oriented aesthetic focusing upon surface and pastiche.

Then as now, apparently, it makes little difference to buyers whether they pay exorbitant prices for artists who have yet to firmly establish their celebrity, much less their long-standing credibility.

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22 Gaywood, “yBa as Critique”, 91.
**Focus on Galleries**

Po PoMo is defined by a focus not on museums but on galleries and private collections. People respond to the showcasing of artists through the purchases of well known arts benefactors such as Charles Saatchi or François Pinault rather than through the acquisitions or exhibitions of museums. As Thompson points out, “Collectors patronize branded dealers, bid at branded auction houses, visit branded art fairs, and seek out branded artists. You are nobody in contemporary art until you have been branded.”  

The rise of the gallery system as we know it today also has its beginnings with Andy Warhol, or at least his art dealer. The first great branded art dealer was Leo Castelli, who was the first to traffic the Pop artists. Castelli firmly believed that an artist’s work was made to be shown and began franchising his artists domestically and internationally by partnering with other galleries to show his artists’ work. Castelli thus created a trusted brand that built customer confidence. “The brand gave clients the confidence that neither the artwork not its price need ever be questioned.”

What we find with top galleries today is not very different from the model that Castelli launched and perfected. The top, branded galleries of the Po PoMo period work closely with their artists, making sure they are provided for and in the

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23 Thompson, *$12 Million*, 12.
24 Thompson, *$12 Million*, 34.
public eye. Most of them have an international presence, either with galleries in various art market cities or by representation at the increasingly common art fairs held throughout the year. Perhaps the best example of a top gallery is the Gagosian Gallery. With galleries in London, Hong Kong, Beverly Hills and three in New York, Gagosian enjoys a well established international presence. Known for his savvy marketing and selling skills, Larry Gagosian represents a notable number of top artists, ranging from Jasper Johns to Ghada Amer. Gagosian is one of the most trusted and respected galleries in the world.

Increasingly, there is a focus on art fairs where collectors can go to get everything they might need under one roof. Art fairs offer a significant opportunity for galleries and artists to spread their brands to an international audience, as people from all over the world come to see what the new hot style or artist is. Held over the course of each year, such art fairs as Art Basel (held in both Switzerland and Miami), Frieze (held in London), and The Armory Show (held in New York) assemble a plethora of galleries and innovative artists. These fairs can actually be the best opportunity for a gallery to present their artists as there are so many people attending and looking to buy.
DEFINING TRAITS

Dissemination of Information/Globalization

One of the contributing factors in the differentiation between Post
Modernism and Po PoMo is the dissemination of information. The fall of the
Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War in 1989 brought a greater use and
exchange of ideas throughout the world. Mark C. Taylor states,

> Developments set in motion in the 1960s reached a turning point in the
1990s. As electronic information and telematic technologies became more
sophisticated, their social, political, economic, and cultural impact became
more significant.\(^\text{25}\)

While globalization was on the rise even before the 1980s, the recent technology
boom has not only increased the opportunities to gather information, but also the
speed. This has had a significant impact on the artworld and artistic practices.

The most important factor for the propagation of ideas and artistic practices
is the exponential growth and use of the Internet in everyday life. There is an
overabundance of information that was simply not accessible in the pre-Internet
1990s. Globalization has changed the very face of consumerism. At the click of a
button, you can buy almost anything.

> “The contemporary artist,” Anatoly Osmolovsky points out, “is acutely
aware of the function and structure of contemporary society and is an expert in

communication. With very limited means he is able to maximize the dissemination of information.”  

Artists, in other words, learn quickly how to adapt new technologies to benefit themselves. Unknown artists can use a plethora of websites (e.g., etsy.com) that they can use to display their art to an extensive market. While few if any of these artists are likely to achieve Jeff Koons or Andy Warhol status, they still are able to create and sell art without the representation of a gallery. The idea of technology transforming the face of consumerism can also be applied to how galleries promote an artist. Where a collector once canvassed galleries and studios to check on the latest work, a gallery intern can simply upload a number of images of an artist’s work and within seconds, collectors can download the images from their email. In an astute variation of the same principle, in 2007, the Gagosian Gallery pre-sold a show of Tom Friedman just by placing the digital images of the works to a secure section of their website. The password was then made available to select clients. More astonishing is that the list prices for the works were as high as $500,000.  

The aura of exclusivity helped sell these artworks just as much as the collector’s interest in owning a Friedman. 

Additionally, many artists increasingly work with computer technology by employing new and interesting ideas within their artwork or using the web as a

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26 Osmolovsky, “Rejection of Museums”, 645.  
27 Thompson, $12 Million, 36.
source of imagery and information for their artwork, biographies, links to their
galleries, and exhibition history. Artists use the internet as a way to publicize
themselves to an infinitely larger audience than ever before, which allows them a
greater measure of message control than previously possible. These advances
have helped to create globalized understanding and a globalized art market.
Artists also use digital technology to further their work; already, Thomas Ruff,
John Currin, Shepard Fairey, and Jeff Koons have reaped the benefits from this
digital bounty.

Globalization has also blurred the lines of nationality and removed the
element of Eurocentricity so prevalent in the artworld of the pre-digital era. With
the creation of the European Union, people can more readily visit other countries
and take part in new experiences and share their own with greater ease. Many
artists, such as Ghada Amer and Shirin Neshat, began to move to new countries to
escape injustice or to start fresh and they brought with them cultural legacies and
artistic heritages that were often excluded from Western discourse, making society
and culture of those countries richer and ripe with ideas. Our time is preoccupied
by “the construction of a contemporary culture—one capable of acting in today’s
reality—from a plurality of perspectives.” With increased frequency, artists migrate to new countries and cultures, are the product of parents of differing nationalities, or have studied their discipline abroad. This has helped to reinvigorate the artworld by giving voice to many artists who lacking access to the system, would never have been considered or would never have participated. Admittedly, these trends already existed in Postmodernism’s heyday. However, the continued and continuously accelerating globalization of art, people and information helped distance Po PoMo from its immediate forbear.

**Intermediality**

Our debt to tradition through reading and conversation is so massive, our protest or private addition so rare and insignificant, - and this commonly on the ground of other reading or hearing, - that, in a large sense, one would say there is no pure originality. All minds quote. Old and new make the warp and woof of every moment. There is no thread that is not a twist of these two strands.\(^{29}\)

\[-\text{Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Quotation and Originality”}\]

Underlying all Po PoMo artwork is the idea of intermediality, a practice that blends and incorporates various aspects together creating a richly layered artwork. While Postmodernism included intermedial practice, with Post


\(^{29}\) Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Quotation and Originality,” *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 31 March 2009, <http://www.rwe.org/?option=com_content&task=view&id=47&Itemid=42>. 27
Postmodernism there is no limit to the ways in which artists can blur the line. 

Most of the instances of Post Postmodernism are, as Eleanor Heartney indicates, …characterized by its removal from a reality whose absence is not even felt. Thus, each supports the [post] postmodern tenet that our understanding of the world is based, first and foremost, on mediated images. Each affirms the notion that we live within the sway of a mythology conjured for us by the mass media, movies, advertisements. 

Many artists such as Takashi Murakami, Gajin Fujita, and Ghada Amer are bringing together multiple points of view, cultural references, and media with an increasing focus on incorporating art with music, fashion, design, and technology. Artists use these sources of information to create monumental works that span ideas and decades. These works are both monumental in size, much like the paintings of the Abstract Expressionists, and monumental in concept by weaving together many ideas and forms into a richly integrated composition.

Murakami has been using his work to minimize the boundaries between high and low culture by blending the aspects of *otaku* with a flat Pop Art style, fusing together aspects of East and West to create a new and innovative type of imagery called Superflat. Born in Tokyo, Murakami was a student at the Tokyo National University of Fine Art and Music, where he focused on traditional Japanese artistic production of Nihonga, which is a blending of eastern and western styles of art. Murakami became disillusioned with Nihonga, and began to

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focus his art on the *otaku* culture of Japan, a subculture that is obsessed with *manga* (comic books), video games and *anime*. Feeling that this was a more representative style of Japanese culture, Murakami’s Superflat style appropriates images and themes from *otaku* culture that are represented as flat planes of color.

One such work is *Kaikai with Moss* (2000, Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, Fig. 4). This work shows a cartoon style character on a silver background with shiny button eyes dressed in what seems to be a rabbit costume. Surrounding the figure are a number of flowers on a vine that all sport large, half moon smiles. These images are indicative of Murakami’s Superflat style, with no shading or modeling of the figures within the work as well as the bubble-gum happiness that exudes from the canvas.

Murakami built his own factory, called KaiKai Kiki. With studios in both New York and Japan, Murakami, along the lines of Warhol, Koons, and Hirst, oversees the conceptual aspects of his artwork while his assistants manufacture the product. KaiKai Kiki manages artists and has been influential in creating a market for emerging Japanese artists as well as organizing an art fair called Geisai.

Gajin Fujita successfully creates a remix of cultures within his body of work.\(^{31}\) A Japanese-American artist born and raised in Los Angeles, Fujita blends

his own cultural heritage to create large scale stencil and hand drawn works that incorporate graffiti, anime, logos, and hip-hop culture with the traditional Japanese representation of geisha, samurai, and natural motifs. Fujita is strongly influenced by Ukiyo-e, traditional Japanese woodcut printing, and Shunga, traditional Japanese erotic prints. Not only are these works culturally layered but physically layered, as Ukiyo-e prints are traditionally layered color and form upon color and form, so too is it like a graffiti artist’s work with multiple layers of image and text. Fujita’s use of a flat, linear style dominates the foreground of his works while he uses elements of street culture to dominate the background such as his work Loca (2007, Haunch of Venison, London, Fig. 5).

One of the most interesting aspects of Fujita’s work is his play on male and female as well as truth and fiction. For example, in Loca, the style of collar that the samurai is wearing is in a distinctly female style, one that no self-respecting samurai would be caught wearing. But this is also knowledge of which most viewers, especially in the Western world, would be unaware. As for his play on truth and fiction, Fujita always stamps his prints with a red stamp mark. In Japanese printmaking, the red stamp is the artist’s signature stamp, called a “chop” mark on which the artist’s teacher carves his name, so that the mark of the master is always present on work of the apprentice. This serves as a sign of respect and
homage to the masters of the past. Yet, as Fujita was not traditionally trained in this medium he would not legitimately have a chop mark.

Using a style that exemplifies the ideas of intermediality is the Egyptian-American artist Ghada Amer. Amer takes images from pornographic magazines and sketches them on an unprimed canvas, usually overlaying the same image multiple times, such as her work *Knotty but Nice* (2005, Gagosian Gallery, New York, Fig. 6). She then embroiders the canvas with thread in motley colors. Amer does not pull all of the thread neatly through the canvas but leaves large portions of it hanging out. On first glance it looks like a mass of colorful lines with the feeling of an Abstract Expressionist’s painting most closely aligned with Jackson Pollock. But if you step closer, you see that the thread partially obscures the erotic images of women underneath.

Amer’s work simultaneously questions some of the basic tenets of the Modernist movement, most notably the idea of the male as artistic genius as well as the female nude as an artistic ideal. By using sewing as an artistic medium and by placing it on a canvas, Amer blurs the line between high and low art as well as male and female work. Amer does not use pornographic images as a way to eroticize women, she uses them to show that women cannot be cast as the sexual submissive, but have their own needs and desires as well. By partially obscuring
the females in her work, she gives them a type of privacy. It is only on closer inspection that we come to understand that we have disturbed them.

*Remix/Postproduction*

As the mediated image has become an integral part of our cultural currency it is impossible to find an instance of an image that does not connect itself to another artwork or text. Society today trades in connections between individuals, cultures, and ideas, which allows for an intricately woven society that interacts with a fluency that was not possible before the digital age. We live in a culture that Lawrence Lessig would refer to as “remix”, or Nicolas Bourriaud as “postproduction”. As digital media becomes less expensive and more easily accessible it becomes easier for individuals to emulate and copy images that they admire and share with a host of people. To Lessig, “whether text or beyond text, remix is collage; it comes from combining elements of…culture; it succeeds by leveraging the meaning created by the reference to build something new.”32 This understanding is now overwhelming practice. It has become easy to reference and expand on elements of culture and find others who share your perspective.

YouTube is the quintessential online platforms for remix. This website allows

people to share clips from television shows or movies that they like or home videos of their family as well as their own personal rendition of a music video.

Many artists and musicians encourage the remix of their works. Take for example the rock group OK Go, who made a low budget music video for the song “A Million Ways”, which filmed the band synchronously dancing in the backyard of one of the band members. The video became such an Internet sensation that the band decided to have a contest to see which fans could recreate the video best in exchange for tickets to one of their concerts as well as the privilege of dancing on stage live with the band.

But we also find remix within the artworld in the form of postproduction. As Bourriaud states, “…artists’ intuitive relationship with art history is now going beyond what we call ‘the art of appropriation,’ which naturally infers an ideology of ownership, and moving toward a culture of the use of forms, a culture of constant activity of signs based on a collective ideal: sharing.”

Actively recycling the work of past artistic movements, the artists of Post Postmodernism such as Banksy, Kehinde Wiley, and Shepard Fairey give new meaning to the works they reference. Artists of Post Postmodernism do not dematerialize objects,

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like the Postmodern Conceptualists, but actively mix and combine elements together to generate new meaning.\textsuperscript{34}

Banksy is the rare graffiti artist who successfully made the transition to contemporary artist. First famous for his distinctive stenciling technique and anti-establishment vogue, Banksy used urban streets, most notably London and New York, as a platform for his satirical pieces about politics, society, and culture. As his art has trickled into the auction houses and the collections of prominent collectors Banksy gained a foothold in the gallery-enclosed artworld.

One particular work of interest is Banksy’s painting, \textit{Keep it Spotless (Defaced Hirst)} (2007, Private Collection, Fig. 7), in which Banksy defaces an original Damien Hirst spot painting. Taking one of his own signature works of a maid sweeping the dirt under the side of a building, Banksy stencils this figure over the Hirst spot painting with the maid lifting the bottom of the canvas so she can sweep the dirt behind it. This work is both humorous and disrespectful. It all at once reminds us of the artist who created the spot painting and the market machine that made it so valuable. By defacing Hirst’s painting, Banksy invokes the taboo of destroying another artist’s work, which is just as disrespectful in the fine arts realm as well as within graffiti culture. \textit{Keep it Spotless} also references Postmodern artists such as Robert Rauchenberg, who in 1953 asked Willem de

\textsuperscript{34} Bourriaud, \textit{Postproduction}, 45.
Kooning if he could erase one of his drawings—Rauchenberg’s now infamous *Erased de Kooning Drawing*. Banksy raised his low art media to the status of high art by incorporating his own work into Hirst’s as well as letting the painting be sold at auction at Sotheby’s, thumbing his nose at both in the process. And people love it. *Spotless* fetched $1,870,000, far beyond the $250,000 - 350,000 estimate.

Kehinde Wiley works with one foot firmly in the past and one firmly in the present. An artist who makes larger-than-life portraits of black urban males, Wiley integrates into his compositions the style of historical portraiture. Wiley has an interesting method to his work. Holding casting calls in cities, Wiley will pick his subjects and then allow them to peruse art books to decide how they would like to be depicted. One such work, *Napoleon Leading the Army Over the Alps* (2005, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, Fig. 8) references Jacques-Louis David’s *Bonaparte Crossing the Alps at Grand-Saint-Bernard*, in which David painted an equestrian portrait of a victorious Napoleon Bonaparte crossing the Alps. Wiley makes no changes to the original composition other than placing a young black male astride the horse’s back wearing his street clothes, as well as adding a red and gold tapestry to the background forsaking the landscape background of the David original. Traditionally, historical portraits were used as a type of propaganda tool to relate to the viewer the class, wealth and status of the subject, as well as celebrate the achievements of the person painted. Wiley
“confronts and critiques cultural traditions that do not acknowledge the experience of urban Black culture. His approach presents a new brand of portraiture that affirms Black identity and simultaneously questions the history of Western painting.”

One of the more interesting aspects of remix and postproduction is the phenomenon of copyright infringement. As many Post Postmodern artists use other sources as a reference for their work, they are in danger of being sued. This is the case with the artist Shepard Fairey and his most famous creation, the tricolor image of then Presidential-candidate Barack Obama entitled *HOPE* (2008, National Portrait Gallery, Washington D.C., Fig. 9). Fairey is a street artist that owns his own design agency and skillfully straddles the areas of fine, commercial, and propaganda art. Fairey creates multi-layered works that reference all aspects of culture including hip-hop, skateboarding, and art history. The Associated Press is currently suing Fairey for copyright infringement over the photo that was the basis of *HOPE*’s design. From a hoard of images culled from the internet, Fairey made one of his signature stencil posters hoping that his work would help get Obama elected. When the Associated Press realized that they owned the rights to

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35 “Collections: Contemporary Art: Napoleon Leading the Army over the Alps” Brooklyn Museum, 1 April 2009, <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/169803/Napoleon_Leading_the_Army_over_the_Alps>. 

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the source image, it sued Fairey for infringement of fair use. In his defense, Fairey responded,

I am fighting the AP to protect the rights of all artists, especially those with a desire to make art with social commentary. This is about artistic freedom and basic rights of free expression, which need to be available to all, whether they have money and lawyers or not. I created the Obama image as a grassroots tool solely to help Obama get elected president.\(^{36}\)

Fairey believes that as he did not use the posters for monetary gain, and that since his work sufficiently transformed the original image both in context and content, he did not infringe on the artistic rights of the photographer, Mannie Garcia, or the rights of the Associated Press.

Intermediality, remix and postproduction create avenues between ideas, theories, and images. By taking stock of the information already out there, Post Postmodern artists are able to create multi-layered artworks that evoke a sense not only of the present but of the past. In Bourriaud’s words, “The art of the twentieth century is an art of *montage* (the succession of images) and *détourage* (the superimposition of images),”\(^{37}\) with *détourage* becoming the basic mode of function for artists of Post Postmodernism. What may take longer to actualize is


\(^{37}\) Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, 42.
the judicial system’s awareness that we all share and trade in images and that the idea of original creativity belongs within the realm of remix.

**Meta-Mentality**

Po PoMo’s profusion of meta-ideas derives from the use of appropriation on a grand scale. Heartney explains, “The postmodern art object [is] decked out with a gleaming new theoretical raiment and sparkle[s] with impressively obscure terms like ‘simulacrum,’ ‘hyperreality,’ ‘critical complexity,’ and ‘commodity critique.’”38 One of the leading theoretical tenets of the Po PoMo era is that there are no new images or forms in art. It makes sense then that artists rework and recontextualize images rather than adding to the plethora of images. Artists take pictures of pictures, incorporate full advertisements into their works or flout copyright laws to make their art.

For example, since the early 1980s, Sherrie Levine has been creating appropriations from highly respected and established modernist artists. As the world is already too filled with images, Levine questions the need for any new images at all and focuses her work on parody and the idea of art for art’s sake. For her work, *After Walker Evans* (1981, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Fig. 10), Levine took photographs of the original photographs out of an exhibition

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38 Heartney, *Postmodernism*, 41.
catalogue. Interestingly enough, these were already reproductions. She then prints the photographs, in sizes that were smaller or larger than the original photographs and she was sure to include any abnormalities within the reproductions (the Evans catalogue photographs were greened out in the printing).

Levine has said about her works,

> I am interested in making a work that has as much aura as its reference. For me the tension between the reference and the new work doesn't really exist unless the new work has an auratic presence of its own. Otherwise, it just becomes a copy, which is not that interesting.\(^\text{39}\)

What Levine does is to take us directly back to the original, which she is copying. In the process, what she succeeds in doing is adding more layers of meaning to the work than were originally there. She also uses her appropriations to highlight the fact that very few women artists from the modernist era are given the status of artist genius as well as to pay homage to specific artists that she respects.

Levine also candidly acknowledges that she wants her work to be a commodity and she places a monetary value on everything that she has made. She says, “My works were never intended to be anything but commodities. It's taken a while for the work to sell but it has always been my hope that it would, and that it

would wind up in collections and in museums. You know, money talks but it don’t sing.”

That Levine has raised interesting issues of authorship and originality is without a doubt. But, this has not stopped her from being sued. With *After Walker Evans*, Levine was also sued for copyright infringement. The Walker Evans Trust won the case, as the court held that Levine had not sufficiently altered the images and further ruled that Levine’s appropriations were forfeited to the Trust. What is most interesting now is that after Levine opened the door to questioning originality, Michael Mandiberg, a Brooklyn-based artist, created the websites aftersherrielevine.com and afterwalkerevans.com. Mandiberg obtained permission to use both the original Evans photographs as well as the Levine’s from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, which now owns both series of works. His websites provide exact instructions for creating your very own Sherrie Levine work, as well as a letter of authenticity that you can print at home. On his websites, Mandiberg writes,

By distributing the images online with certificates of authenticity, the images are accessible by anyone…the certificates here are used to insure that each satellite image be considered with equal authenticity [to Levine’s work], not the opposite. This is an explicit strategy to create a physical object with cultural value, but little or no economic value.  

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40 Constance Lewallen, “Sherrie Levine.”
Jeff Koons’ name is almost synonymous with appropriation, following a three-decade career forged on recontextualizing and appropriating imagery. While establishing his name as an artist, Koons worked briefly for a commodities broker on Wall Street, a job that surely solidified the true worth of a dollar and informed the way in which he presented not only his art, but himself within the artworld. In an article for London’s *Independent*, Arifa Akbar reports,

> In an era when artists were not regarded as ‘stars’, Koons went to great lengths to cultivate his public persona by employing an image consultant and placing advertisements in international art magazines featuring photographs of himself surrounded by the trappings of success.\(^{42}\)

As his popularity grew, he created a factory in SoHo, just as Warhol had done (yet another form of his appropriation), and employed a number of assistants to help in the creation of his artwork.

While Koons is typically compared to the artists of the Dada period and especially to Marcel Duchamp, his artwork cannot be given the same type of consideration or placed on the same level as that of the Dada artists who were drawing attention to the banality of the world. These artists were outsides, trying to destroy the world with their anarchic compositions and comments. By contrast, Koons works from the inside; he is embraced and lauded for his work and ideals.

Koons has even stated, “A viewer might at first see irony in my work... but I see none at all. Irony causes too much critical contemplation.”¹⁴³ This rejection might be the most ironic part of Koons’ work, particularly because irony and parody are the exact confines in which viewers situate his art. Reaching deliberately towards old hat, Koons exploits incidental and completely familiar images by taking them to a ridiculous level, one completely out of proportion to what we feel about a balloon animal or a vacuum cleaner. This assault places these objects firmly within the context of the cutely unfamiliar, his brand of artistic genius. In his work Balloon Dog (Yellow) (1994-2000, The Steven and Andrea Cohen Collection, New York, Fig. 11), an absurdly oversized stainless steel sculpture of a balloon dog, Koons literally wants you to focus only on surface. No more, no less. With Balloon Dog, your attention is placed firmly on the shiny exterior of an oversized child’s birthday favor.

While there is a lack of new imagery being made during the Post Postmodern period there tends to be large editions of works made. Some artists, when confronted with popular demand can simply reissue a new series of previously produced works or mass produce from the outset. Liz Kotz points out, “…In a publicity-driven artworld without any means of determining value except

the market, a shrewd joining of technical skill, mannerist sensibility, and photogenic appeal prevails…[artists] offer a complete line of subsidiary products for collectors to take home.”

Discontented by the lack of opportunity for an artist to market him or herself in Japan and understanding the power of consumerism, Murakami markets his brand with a variety of merchandise for his work. From key chains to dolls, Murakami ensures that there is a souvenir of his art for any and every person interested. Speaking of his particular form of line blurring, Murakami stated,

I don’t think of it as straddling. I think of it as changing the line. What I’ve been talking about for years is how in Japan, that line is less defined. Both by the culture and by the past-War economic situation Japanese people accept that art and commerce will be blended; and in fact, they are surprised by the rigid and pretentious Western hierarchy of ‘high art.’ In the West, it certainly is dangerous to blend the two because people will throw all sorts of stones. But that's okay—I’m ready with my hard hat.

While not an issue of mass production, there is an issue of uniqueness that adds to the value of an artwork. Damien Hirst’s activity lets us put this situation into perspective. In 2006, Hirst created a new shark sculpture entitled, The Wrath of God as an addendum to his shark sculpture, The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Somebody Living, otherwise known as the $12 million stuffed shark. Hirst originally created The Physical Impossibility in 1992. Comprised of

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a fifteen-foot tiger shark in a vitrine full of formaldehyde, the shark was improperly preserved and it began to deteriorate, making the water murky. By 2005, Hirst decided to replace the shark. He went back to the fisherman who caught the original shark and asked him for four more. Thus, after he replaced the shark in *The Physical Impossibility* he created a whole new sculpture. Hirst deliberately infringed on his own brand. He took away the unique quality of his first work and raised questions about the potential pieces that might incorporate the additional sharks.

Another incarnation of Post Postmodernism’s meta-mentality is the focus on elevating erotic subjects to a level that could be considered hard core pornography. Some artists turn pornographic imagery into large scale canvases or make monumental blow up butt plug sculptures. Many of these works do not hint at sexuality but blatantly place it in front of the viewers face. One only has to look at Jeff Koons’ series *Made in Heaven*, to glean some understanding of the debauched character of this production. In this series, Koons photographed himself, with his soon-to-be wife, Ilona Staller (La Cicciolina), the porn star *cum* Italian parliament member, *en flagrante*, and then formatted the photographs to billboard sized canvases and statuary.

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46 Thompson, *$12 Million*, 64.
Known for his photographs of living spaces and his passport-style photos devoid of emotion or expression, Thomas Ruff published in 2003 a series of photographs entitled *Nudes*, which included the work *Nudes dyk03* (1999, Staatliche Kunsthalle, Baden-Baden, Fig. 12). For this series, Ruff took photographs from internet porn sites and blurred, enlarged, and colored the photographs. This work is very explicit. This work is very explicit but also ambiguous. It seems to evoke a sexual experience through the blurred faces and body parts, the heady feeling of haziness that takes over the senses. It could be a recreation of the artist's own experience or an attempt to manipulate the public by evoking possible sexual desires of the viewers.

Another artist who infuses his work with pornographic imagery is Paul McCarthy. An artist whose work has spanned decades, McCarthy deals in the gross and dirty side of the physical (literally and figuratively). McCarthy’s work has progressed from performance to video to sculpture and installation. His works offer a comment on society and its focus on media and consumption with a focus on the grittiness of life. McCarthy’s work is intentionally provocative as he tries to test the limits and boundaries of his audience. Often his works focus on sex, violence, and their portrayal in mass media. His kinetic sculptures incorporate robotic figures performing obsessively repetitive actions. These sculptures are reminiscent of an amusement park with a dash of wickedness thrown in—these are
an amusement park straight out of a horror movie. While viewing one of these works, your senses are assaulted by the sound of gears shifting and the clanking of metal. You watch the jerky movement of the figures over and over again performing actions that are less than comforting, such as his work, *Cultural Gothic* (1992-3, Rubell Family Collection, Miami, Fig. 13), where a father is encouraging his son to sodomize a goat. McCarthy references *American Gothic*, the iconic work by Grant Wood, but at the same time puts a spin on this seemingly backwoods practice. As the father and son are dressed in urban clothing, they would be the picture of conservativism if the goat were not present. This juxtaposition of father and son with goat makes you question what lurks just below the surface.

Another McCarthy work that is perhaps less disturbing and more amusing is *Butt Plug* (2007). McCarthy places the large, inflatable sculpture in large, idyllic outdoor spaces. This is an item that no one would expect to see in a park much less in public. A butt plug is something you would hide in your own home so coming face to face with it on a monumental scale creates a sense of incongruity between the natural and the manmade, the public and the private. This work too can be placed within the context of the art historical by looking at the more benign monumental sculptures of everyday objects such as a tube of lipstick or a garden spade.
The overwhelming use of appropriation seems to suggest that there is nothing new to create, and therefore the only avenue artists have left to explore is to make artworks by incorporating both their own ideas and expanding the practices that have come before. This works at a time when there is no quality control within the art market. People today are rarely looking for something that they can enjoy for a long period of time but instead prefer something that they can sell in five years to make a profit. The meta-mentality of Post Postmodern artists panders to the desires of the public for scandalous art (whether in regards to originality or taste) as well as builds upon the idea of recycling imagery into new and innovative works.

Remerging Artistic Forms: Painting and Photography

Since the 1980s, painting has remerged as a principle means of artistic production. Straight painting was vehemently ignored for most of the Postmodernist period and was considered a style of the past. Artists were more concerned with using up-to-date technology and performance as their artistic media and could not be bothered with antiquated painting techniques. But the Neo-Expressionists reintroduced painting in reaction to Conceptual and Minimalist art of the 1970s. Neo-Expressionism is an art movement defined by its use of heavy, violent brushwork that expresses the aggressive emotions of the
artist. The success of Neo-Expressionism helped to reintroduce painting as a respected artistic practice. If we needed any other sense of painting’s victorious return, in 2005 the Saatchi Gallery hosted the show “Triumph of Painting” that represented the works of painters such as Martin Kippenberger, Marlene Dumas, and Peter Doig. The triumphant return of painting to the forefront of artistic production can be exemplified by John Currin and Peter Doig as their modes of representation differ in style and method.

John Currin is an artist of extraordinary technical skill. His integration of Mannerism and overt sexuality has set him apart from his colleagues. Rising to prominence in a time when figural painting was far from popular, Currin stood out by using a style that was underrepresented at the time. Currin’s painterly technique, of realistic accuracy, places him as an heir to the Dutch, Italian and German Mannerists. But his subject matter firmly brings him into the realm of Po PoMo. “Mining sources as diverse as Old Master portraits, 1970s Playboy magazine advertisements, and mid-twentieth century film, he has produced beautifully rendered yet queasy compositions that suggest a slippery and challenging new aesthetic rooted in the artifice and stylistic extravagance of High Mannerism.”

47 Currin’s paintings take an unflinching look at the aspects of

contemporary society and he produces them with master draftsmanship. There is something strikingly familiar about Currin’s compositions, yet something vaguely disturbing. You are reminded of a scene stolen from Mantegna, Cranach or Holbein, yet the vacancy of the subjects’ faces and eyes within their contemporary settings and fantasies, makes them cold, distant, and disconcerting. One work, *The Pink Tree* (1999, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C., Fig. 14), depicting two young women in front of a pink tree seamlessly incorporates sexuality, Mannerism, and the works of Cranach the Elder. Currin’s love of Mannerism is evidenced by the elongation of the women’s arms and legs as well as their disproportionately large breasts and hips, which infuses the work with Currin’s preoccupation with sexuality. Additionally, the composition directly relates to nudes of Cranach through the posture of the women, their distended bellies and the use of a black background.

Peter Doig works with a method completely divorced from that of Currin. Using found photographs as a reference point for his work, Doig creates paintings of a magical or fantastical realism, which he infuses with his memories of growing up in Canada or from his current surroundings. Doig is fascinated with the idea of memory and plays this out within his compositions. Painting a view across a lake or of a building barely visible through the woods, Doig’s objective is to tell part of a story, one etched in distant memory.
One work that draws inspiration from his childhood is the painting *White Canoe* (1990, Saatchi Gallery, London, Fig. 15). This painting has a sense of eerie calm to it, with the lone canoe floating on a calm lake at nighttime. Set in a riotously colored landscape the white canoe jumps out of the composition and its reflection in the water is meticulously rendered. The eeriness of the painting is perhaps due to the stillness of the scene or that it reminds us of another lake in the *Friday the 13th* movies. Is Jason Voorhees waiting just out of the frame? Perhaps. Just as Doig has used Canada as inspiration so too does he allow his current home in Trinidad to filter into his work. The island landscape takes precedence in many of his most current works. Where works like *White Canoe* have a sense of cool detachment, his current works are more inviting and create a sense of warmth.

As painting has returned to the forefront of artistic production, one of the many media gaining ground during the Po PoMo period is photography. While photography has been used as an artistic medium for over a hundred years, it has to be the greatest success story of the past twenty years. Writing about photography in his essay, *The Photographic Message*, Roland Barthes expounds on why the photograph perfectly corresponds with the object it represents. He states, “A ‘historical grammar’ of iconographic connotation ought thus to look for its material in painting, theatre, association of ideas, stock metaphors, etc., that is
to say, precisely in ‘culture.’”⁴⁸ Photography provides viewers the best opportunity to associate what is being represented with what they know. Photographs are easy to read and they do not typically confuse or frustrate the viewer. We can all relate to what is being represented because photographs do not distort the familiar shapes and forms we recognize in reality. Almost everyone has used a camera at least once in his or her life, and the fact that it is universal and common makes photography a readily accepted art form for the masses, even if it was not so readily embraced by the upper echelons of the artworld. But, as people began buying prints because they were a more affordable item than paintings and sculptures, photographers began to see a surge of interest in their medium. With an influx of artists choosing to pick up a camera instead of pick up a brush and an increased interest within the art market, photography was finally realized as a respected medium. We begin to see serious collectors choosing artists such as Cindy Sherman, Jeff Wall or Andreas Gursky to add to their art collections.

It is during this time that we see the world record for a modern photograph: Edward Steichen’s Pond-Moonlight (1904) was sold in 2006 for a staggering $2,928,000 dollars at an auction at Sotheby’s.⁴⁹ That a photograph could fetch such a tremendous price at auction proves that photography has made it into the

limelight. In fact by 1971 Sotheby’s realized, if not the artistic value, than at least the potential for the buying and selling of photographs on the secondary market. The firm opened its first photographic department in London and closely followed with a New York branch in 1975.\textsuperscript{50} But even the staggering amount paid for Steichen’s work was outstripped by a contemporary photograph by Andreas Gursky. Early in 2007, again at Sotheby’s, his photograph, \textit{99Cent II, Diptych} (2001), was sold at auction for an astounding £1,700,000 or $3,346,456.\textsuperscript{51}

As a photographer who has lifted photography to a high art medium and fused the idea of high art as equaling expensive photography, Gursky is one of the more recognizable photographers of Post Postmodernism. Gursky utilizes both large format and digital manipulation to create clean crisp prints.\textsuperscript{52} With his deadpan style, Gursky’s work has a documentary feel to it that is devoid of emotion or feeling. Gursky’s photographs overlook expansive scenes. They are large, brilliant with color and light, and global in their representation, documenting places from the Tokyo stock exchange to a ninety-nine cent store. Gursky’s photographs are monumental in scale (much like historical landscape paintings) and place the viewer, as an individual, into the perspective of one small person in

\begin{footnotes}
\item[50] ‘Photographs Overview,’ Sotheby’s.com.
\end{footnotes}
a very large world. For example his work, *Arena III* (2003, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C., Fig. 16) depicts from afar an arena field being re-sodded by tiny workers. The framing of the shot makes it difficult to determine what type of sport is played much less where the arena is located; line and form become the subject of the photograph.

One style of photography that has come to the fore during the Po PoMo period is tableau. Tableau is a style steeped in art historical tradition and so too, is another form of Post Postmodern appropriation. First used in the 17th and 18th centuries by figurative painters, tableaus are used to tell a story. Much as the viewer of those centuries relied on acquired knowledge to determine the subject and meaning of the story, as Charlotte Cotton describes it, “we rely on the same cultural ability to recognize a combination of characters and props as a pregnant moment in the story.”\(^{53}\) A photographer well known for his tableau style, Jeff Wall came to prominence in the late 1980s with his oversized light box photographs. Wall takes inspiration from many of the great artists of the past and has been known to incorporate elements of their compositions into his photographs. Wall has been working with digital photography for much of his career, which allows him to create oversized prints with clearly focused detail. But it is his ability to tell a story within a single image that makes him such a

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\(^{53}\) Cotton, *The Photograph*, 49.
spectacular photographer and places him on par with the likes of the great tableau painters of the past. Stewart Martin has said of Wall’s work, “His lightboxes fuse the scale of the return to painting with the commodity aesthetic of advertising display, matched in time with corresponding revenues…Wall’s is a postconceptualist painting of modern life.”

It is Wall’s clear attention to detail and use of lighting that makes his works all at once overwhelming and engaging. Take for example his photograph, *After ‘Invisible Man’ by Ralph Ellison, the Prologue* (1999-2000, Emanuel Hoffman Foundation, Basel, Fig. 17). Wall recreates the basement apartment of this invisible man meticulously. From the 1,369 lights that he uses to illuminate his basement apartment to the phonograph that he listens to Louis Armstrong records on, Wall faithfully records this cluttered and forgotten habitation. Wall infuses this photograph with the pathos and tension that fill the mind and soul of the invisible man and the loneliness he must feel.

Cindy Sherman has also been using her skills to bring photography to the forefront of the artworld. Since bursting onto the scene in the 1970s with her series *Untitled Film Stills* (1979-1980, Museum of Modern Art, New York, Fig. 18), Sherman has been creating an oeuvre that is admired by artists, critics and the

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public alike. Calvin Tomkins quotes MoMA’s photography chairman Peter Galassi as saying, “The rhetoric of the postmodernist revolution has turned out to be a good deal less persuasive than it first seemed to many people…whereas Sherman’s work only seems more and more persuasive.”

Sherman masterfully incorporates narrative into her photographs. From her *Untitled Film Stills* to her *Disaster* series, Sherman has been using her camera to explore ideas of personality, sexuality, and the grotesque.

Never pushing her own opinion and ideas on the viewer, Sherman lets her photographs allow for many interpretations. Typically employing herself as the subject, Sherman consistently appropriates the ideas of images in her photographs. What the viewer is confronted with is the familiarity of an image, a movie, a Master painting. And while Sherman uses B-movies, paintings, and advertisements as inspiration she never actually photographs a recreation. Perhaps that is one of the most haunting and dynamic aspects of her work. It gives us a false sense of security in that we have seen the image or person before but there is always that nagging suspicion that something is off; it is not quite right. This is one of the reasons that Sherman refuses to title her photographs, she prefers to keep the work ambiguous. It is this aesthetic that has skyrocketed Sherman to the top of her field.

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An unassuming and quiet individual, Sherman shares in none of the qualities of her startist colleagues. She is more comfortable to take a back seat to the art market hoopla and just allow her work to be. As her work grew more popular, she became embarrassed by her individual success and guilty that she was the center of so much attention, when some of her good friends were not.\(^5^6\) It would seem that shameless self-promotion and self-branding are not the only ways to get to the top.

Building upon the ideas of identity introduced by Sherman, photographer Nikki S. Lee stormed the art world with her art that references the importance of identity and drawn from her new experiences with subcultures and different ethnic groups. She explained her interest by saying, “I grew up in Korea for twenty-four years. There was only one race; I never felt any concept of race, of minority or majority.”\(^5^7\)

Her first exhibited series "Projects" (1997-2001) explores various subcultures and ethnic groups from skateboarders to senior citizens, swing dancers to rednecks. Lee would spend several months preparing for each project, carefully studying the styles and attitudes of the members of the group she was interested in, such as *The Hispanic Project* (1998, Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects, New York).

\(^5^6\) Tomkins, *Lives*, 36.
York, Fig. 19). She would transform herself into a “member” of these communities by manipulating her hair, dress, skin tone and posture.\textsuperscript{58} She would then approach these groups and tell them that she was an artist, many not believing her or caring, and would begin to incorporated herself into their activities for several weeks. She would give a member of the group a regular snap-shot camera and have them take pictures of her and the group, her only stipulation being that she had to be in the shot.

Her success as an artist is due to her personal style. “Her use of the snapshot aesthetic is partly what convinces us that she belongs—along with her uncanny ability to strike the right pose.”\textsuperscript{59} The photographs bear the hallmarks of any individual’s photographs developed at a drugstore; the time date stamp in the lower right hand corner, a blurring of the subject, a washing out from the flash. That Lee then takes these photographs and places them on the gallery wall reveals their conceptual nature. Lee believes that “essentially life itself is a performance. When we change our clothes to alter our appearance, the real act is the transformation of our way of expression—the outward expression of our psyche.”\textsuperscript{60} All of these photographs allow the viewer to relate their own

\textsuperscript{58} Berwick, "Extreme Makeover", 112.


\textsuperscript{60} “Nikki S. Lee,” Museum of Contemporary Photography.
experiences either as a member of a particular subculture or what we think about them.

The reemergence of painting and photography has shown that there is no exclusive mode of artistic representation. Post Postmodern artists are willing to employ any and many media to successfully express their ideas and talent to the world. Both forms are used to incorporate a remix of past styles and concepts, as well as add to the discussion of what art is within the Post Postmodern condition.
CONCLUSION—PROJECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Art should make us feel more clearly and more intelligently…Some think so much of today’s art mirrors and therefore criticises decadence. Not so. It’s just decadent. Full stop.\(^{61}\)

- Robert Hughes

Po PoMo is an art movement founded on the ideal of decadence consisting of big art, artists, and market value. Po PoMo is Postmodernism on steroids. Every aspect of this movement is going far beyond the limits, in regards to taste, style, price, and innovation. And yet this is a movement deeply rooted in the artistic practices of the Postmodernists, such that it may never be clearly defined. What we do know, however, is that artists built themselves into brands, acquired management by a gallery, and sold work at famed auction houses; artists have become wildly successful retail machines. The question that cannot be answered is how long this celebrity ecosystem will last.

It seems highly unlikely that the art market can continue to function in its current state. As they say, what goes up must come down and a slowing of the art market seems inevitable. As the countries of the world are facing the worst financial crisis since the stock market crash in 1929, so too the artworld is now facing a crisis of its own. As Post Postmodern artists and their dealers have manipulated the market to achieve astonishing prices through branding and

symbolic, as opposed to cultural, value, it is difficult not to draw an analogy to the overzealous bankers and hedge fund managers on Wall Street. They broke the system by inflating values to the point that the bubble burst. One only has to look at the lackluster returns from the most recent auction sales to realize the art market is broken.

The way people approach art has to change. We can no longer take on faith the idea that art buying is a popularity contest; that owning a Hirst or Murakami will raise our social cachet. Buyers will begin rethinking their budgets and will be unlikely to throw significant amounts of money into luxuries like art. One can imagine how the still developing economic crisis might reduce the art market to a bull market. Art would auction at excessively deflated prices should lynchpin gallerists, dealers and collectors be struck by the global downturn or the scandals that have accompanied it. Collectors may sell off works within their collections, and the potential flooding of the market would probably, and drastically, reduce the resale value of art in the broadest sense. Admittedly, these are simply imagined omens, but in response to the economy, the art markets have already cooled. Indeed, many of the astronomical sales figures reported on individual works often caused the other side of the story to be overlooked; while a few works by hot artists sold at a boiling point, most other sales at those same auctions were tepid or worse. It bears repeating that an art market correction seems inevitable.
While dealers and auctioneers will do anything in their power to keep those prices from dropping, the recent decline in prices at both Christie’s and Sotheby’s heralds a burst in the art market bubble.

With the globalization of art, information, and people, the artworld can no longer pretend to function with a Western-centered mentality. New York, Paris, and Berlin are not the only places where good, and sometimes great, art is created or sold. As the artworld continues to expand ever further beyond the typical art markets, again thanks to globalization, this outward growth is where the momentum lies. Emerging markets in India, China, the Middle East, and Russia all challenge the Western centrality of art and forces the art establishment to respond to new prerogatives.

The stressful economic situation may offer opportunities for change in the manner of artistic production. Today’s weakened global economy cannot support the production (and expected sale) of the decadent artworks that were, until recently, just so in right now. Artists will likely scale back, in edition and size. There may not be a market that is willing or able to bear the production of more giant butt plugs. Whether the Po PoMo generation will still be provocative, or even significant, in the future is hard to determine. The focus of the artworld should now be on renewal; renewal of faith in art as a form that can again inspire and speak to the viewer. What we can hope for is that artists will continue to
provoke thought and provide inspiration; that artists will again inspire us to
question the deeper meaning of things, leaving the simulacra, and the money,
behind.
APPENDIX: LIST OF IMAGES


Fig. 4: Murakami, Takashi. *Kaikai with Moss*. 2000. Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin. [Artnet.com](http://english.kaikaikiki.co.jp/artworks/eachwork/kaikai_with_moss/), 29.


Fig. 7: Banksy. *Keep it Spotless (Defaced Hirst)*. 2007. Private Collection. [Sothebys.com](http://www.sothebys.com/app/live/lot/LotDetail.jsp?lot_id=159428855), 34.
Fig. 8: Wiley, Kehinde. *Napoleon Leading the Army Over the Alps*. 2005.

Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn. [Flickr.com](http://farm1.static.flickr.com/92/276113838_706d035488.jpg), 35.


Fig. 11: Koons, Jeff. *Balloon Dog (Yellow)*. 1994-2000. The Steven and Alexandra Cohen Collection, New York. [Metmuseum.com](http://www.metmuseum.org/special/koons_roof/view_1.asp?item=0&view=l), 42.
Fig. 12: Ruff, Thomas. *Nudes dyk03*. 1999. Staatliche Kunsthalle, Baden-Baden. 


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