



## Co-Creating Art: What Every Collector Needs to Know

Artists aren't exactly known for their accommodating, easy-going ways. More often, words such as "egocentric" and "introverted" spring to mind when thinking of an artist. In reality, though, few artists work in total isolation, especially once they have achieved a certain level of success. This document explores artistic collaborations and the issues of authorship and validation in the joint production of art. As there are numerous forms of collaboration this analysis will focus on mainly three: (i) "**co-production**", when an artist seeks the help of a workshop or assistants; (ii) "**collaboration**", when two artists creatively work together in order to produce an artwork; and (iii) a **collective**, understood as a group of artists that creates an entity with a defined objective from which they develop their artistic production.

### CO-PRODUCTION

According to Webster's *to co-produce* is "to manufacture (goods) in partnership with others."<sup>1</sup> In the art community, this terminology refers to the artists that have largely employed assistants in the realization of their works. From the legal point of view, the artist keeps copyright and ownership title. Therefore, some art market players have questioned the legitimacy of this *modus operandi* and its fairness.

The root of this debate lies in European Renaissance. Considered as the first art historian and often referred to as the "father of art history", Vasari emphasized the importance of the manual ability required to materialize an idea, in order to be recognized as a legitimate artist.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the use of assistants and apprentices has been a standard in the art world for centuries. Michelangelo, Rembrandt and Da Vinci relied heavily on the assistants in their studios. Master Rubens had plenty of pupils who had the privilege of assisting him in his work: Van Dyck, Jordaens, Snyders, etc.<sup>3</sup>

"Despite removing the artist's hand from the artwork and alienating the idea of the artist as skilled worker, the artist became further elevated as the ultimate authority on conceiving and "authorizing" the artwork, in some ways an affirmation of the earlier idea of artists as men of intellect

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<sup>1</sup> "Co-produce." Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Web. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/co-production>>.

<sup>2</sup> Hyde, Vernon. "The Renaissance." *Art History's History*. Second Edition ed. Prentice Hall, 2001. 12. Print.

<sup>3</sup> Lumberras, Javier. *The Art of Collecting Art*. Fomento Cultural Banamex, Barcelona, 2011. p. 264.



and enquiry.”<sup>4</sup> The removal of required physical skill, as promoted by Duchamp’s practice, only increased the artist’s significance, as an artwork could now simply be the idea conceived by the artist. This, in essence, gave birth to conceptual art. “The value of a work of art is not invested in the hand that made it, but in the intention of the artist.” says Robert Storr, dean of Yale University's School of Art.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, some artists argue that this approach is the only way to bring their ideas to life in order to overcome physical limitations, lack of craftsmanship or timing. This is the case of artists like Francis Alÿs, with artworks like *Faith Moves Mountains* (2002) where a giant sand dune in Peru was moved a few inches over, with the help of 500 volunteers. Obviously, this feat could not have been performed by just one guy with a shovel.

However, there is an important difference in how the Old Masters used artist assistants compared to how artists, such as Damien Hirst, typically use assistants today. Such dissimilarity lies in recognition. Originally, the Old Masters tended to be very open about the identity of their artist assistants. After all, having a highly skilled art assistant in your studio meant that you, as the master artist, had trained the assistant well and passed on a tradition. On the other hand, contemporary artists use independent workshops and assistants as mere employees that are simply “getting a job done”. In fact, Hirst has openly suggested that he utilizes the service of assistants because he does not have time to be bothered with creating the artwork himself.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, David Hockney explicitly rejected this situation in his last exhibition *A Bigger Picture*, where he placed a poster advertising his new *exhibition*, at the which read: “All the works here were made by the artist himself, personally”.<sup>7</sup>

## COLLABORATION

The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines *collaboration* as: “to work with another person or group in order to achieve or do something”<sup>8</sup> Specifically, an artistic collaboration is the materialized product of two

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<sup>4</sup> Petry, Michael. "The Art of Not Making: The New Artist/Artisan Relationship." *The Kelvingrove Review*. Thames & Hudson, 2012. Web. 23 Sept. 2015. <[http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media\\_249376\\_en.pdf](http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_249376_en.pdf)>.

<sup>5</sup> Sesser, Stan. "The Art Assembly Line." *Arts and Entertainment*. The Wall Street Journal, 3 June 2011. Web. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB100014240527023037453045763576817414182827>>.

<sup>6</sup> Sherwin, Brian. "Artists Debate over the Use of Artist Assistants -- Where Do You Stand?" *Fine Art Views*. 1 Sept. 2012. Web. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://faso.com/fineartviews/38751/artists-debate-over-the-use-of-artist-assistants-where-do-you-stand>>.

<sup>7</sup> Dana, Max. "About Artists Who Don't Make Their Own Work." *Max Dana's Blog*. 11 Feb. 2012. Web. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://blog.maxdana.com/design-art/about-artists-who-dont-make-their-own-work/>>.

<sup>8</sup> "Collaborate." Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Web. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/collaborate>>.



artists of renown participating together with the intention to create one single joint work. Theoretically, this should mean equal authorship in an artwork's intellectual conception. Kelly Walker and Wade Guyton, Robert Rauschenberg and Jean Tinguely, Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, Gerhard Richter and Blinky Palermo, Chuck Close and Philip Glass, and even Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, are some examples of how commercially successful an artistic collaboration might be. "Sometimes an artist may seize on an opportunity to explore a form that is foreign to them working with a master of that form. And sometimes a master finds himself in need of an injection of fresh energy to revitalize his work, unlocking creative richness."<sup>9</sup>

Stanford explains the legal side of art collaborations well, stating, "Co-owners of copyright have a legal status known as "tenants in common." That is to say, under copyright law, it doesn't matter who made the final or most critical changes, as both creators are joint copyright owners of the whole work.<sup>10</sup> Collaborative projects raise questions like: "Where did the original idea come from?" or "Who had more of a hand in the final execution?" One of the most famous examples that raised these polemical



Wade Guyton, and Kelley Walker  
*Canstripe Greenredblueyellow Table*  
Installation in Adrastus Collection

interrogations was the collaboration between Warhol and Basquiat. New York Times' critic, Vivienne Raynor described the paintings as "large, bright, messy, full of private jokes and inconclusive." Forfeiting his earlier promise, Basquiat had turned into an "art world mascot" she complained.<sup>11</sup>

Other non-enthusiastic reactions about the artistic collaborations are derived from the own artist's insecurities, as collaborations can easily cause him to become inhibited or demoralized exposure to other people's reactions can be so obfuscatory that he might lose hold of his own convictions and can no longer see his own work clearly. Checking too often with someone else, pausing for feedback with each bit of output, can inhibit or confuse the artist. Therefore, the artist can lose his natural trajectory, intuition, or instinctual aim.

<sup>9</sup> Gupta, Amit. "Artist Collaboration Fuels Creative Exploration." *The Huffington Post*. 20 Nov. 2013. Web. 23 Sept. 2015. <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/amit-gupta/artistic-collaboration-\\_b\\_3763586.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/amit-gupta/artistic-collaboration-_b_3763586.html)>.

<sup>10</sup> Joy, Linda. "Legalities 28: Copyright Ownership for Collaborative Projects." *Sources*. Owen, Wickersham & Erickson, P.C. Web. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.owe.com/resources/legalities/28-copyright-ownership-collaborative-projects/>>.

<sup>11</sup> Kelly, Maura. "Does Artistic Collaboration Ever Work?" *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, 25 July 2012. Web. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2012/07/does-artistic-collaboration-ever-work/260319/>>.



## COLLECTIVES

From Fluxus to the Guerilla Girlz, collectives hold an important place in the history of recent art, and today's scene is particularly notable for the variety and number of these creative partnerships. Plainly, artistic collectives like Allora Calzadilla (in Adrastus Collection) and Superflex, can be defined as "a group of artists who work together to achieve a common goal."<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, these initiatives have complex structures following shared ideologies, aesthetic and political views. Frequently political in nature, the relative anonymity of the collective allows for a high degree of confrontation and challenge, while the union of diverse and multiple talents lends itself to ambitious projects beyond the scope, and the risk willing to be assumed by, most individual artists. Despite the various formats and sizes of collectives, which may adopt the form of couples, quartets, teams, tribes and even amorphous cyberspace communities, they all assume the identity of a single title. Although membership may be official, casual or even accidental, the joint production among parties stands equal.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the prolific production of collectives in contemporary art has been developed as never seen before. Gelitin, Bernadette Corporation, 0100101110101101.ORG, Paper Rad, Claire Fontaine, Artists Anonymous, Dear Raindrop, Etoy Corporation, are just some examples of some of the most profusive artistic assembly.



Gelitin is a group of four artists that attracted attention with their newly designed plush toy: a meters big pink rabbit on "Rabbit hill" at Italy.

The legal aspects of the collective, since the final artistic product is created under a common idea or initiative, implies the coordination or leadership of a juridical title holder, which is the one in charge of editing or publishing under its name. That is to say, the contribution of numerous authors merges under an autonomous and unique institution. In this case (if not stated in a legalized previous document), the copyright and ownership corresponds to the identity from which the publishing and editing comes from.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> "Global Arts Collective (re) Connect - Collaborate - (co) Create." *Global Arts Collective (re) Connect - Collaborate - (co) Create*. Web. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.globalartscollective.org/>>.

<sup>13</sup> Cotter, Holland. "The Collective Conscious." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 4 Mar. 2006. Web. 23 Sept. 2015. <[http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/05/arts/design/05cott.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/05/arts/design/05cott.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)>.

<sup>14</sup> "Derechos De Autor." *Derechos De Autor*. 18 Sept. 2009. Web. 23 Sept. 2015. <[http://www.ugr.es/~derechosdeautor/derechos\\_autor.html](http://www.ugr.es/~derechosdeautor/derechos_autor.html)>.



Artist collectives have existed throughout history and have often gathered around central disruptive political, aesthetic, and anthropological ideals. Collectives during the French and Russian Revolution became meaningful pieces for political movements. The artistic collectives led by artists like Jacques-Louis David and Maximilien Robespierre transcended as ideological bastions that materialized the essence of their era. The ends of the XIX and beginnings of the XX century saw numerous examples of artistic collectives, just like the neo-expressionist painters of CoBrA, concrete poets of the Lettrist International, anarcho-communist theoreticians of the Situationist International, the Imaginist Bauhaus and the Viennese Actionists. The true importance of collectives resides from their inceptive postulate: "Artists' collectives do not make objects – they make changes."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Moore, Alan. "General Introduction to Collectivity in Modern Art." *The Journalist of Aesthetic Protest*. 2012. Web. 23 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.joap.org/new3/moore.html>>.



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