

## **Translocal Art Worlds in Times of Medialization Some Observations of India’s Contemporary Art World in Transition**

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The global recession of 2008 and its immediate impact on the global art market led to discussions in the contemporary art worlds. While most media mischievously unmasked the global art market as a big bubble that had finally burst, art ‘world players’ from all over the world tried to examine the scenario by discussing the flaws and weak points of their art worlds’ mechanisms and conventions. According to the general opinion, the sudden lack of money in the contemporary art world triggered the sifting out of bad contemporary art, dubious collectors and industrialized galleries. Debates on the white wash of the worldwide art business from “false” motivation and purely market-driven interest occurred predominantly in the West<sup>1</sup> and targeted mainly the so-called emerging market countries and their artistic practices. Particularly the contemporary art worlds of India and China have been repeatedly used by Western media to exemplify the rise of emerging economic Asian powers that have discovered contemporary art both as an item of export to the Western exhibition circuit or as a national commodity for financial investment.

Only three years after the recession, the global art market regained its strength. This development is largely due to the wealthy middle classes and the structural development of emerging art markets like India, China, Russia,

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<sup>1</sup> The West as referred to in this article has two connotations. Firstly, the West as the geographical region of North America and (Western) Europe, which shares similar political and socio-economic values. Secondly, the West as a set of cultural values, which are mostly considered as superior to other sets of values, geographically located “outside” the realm of the West. Within the framework of fine art and the system of art, “Western” denotes a specific and mainly European definition of the term fine art. As Zijlmans (1995) points out, the Western definition of fine art is that of once practical and, since the 18th century, conceptual virtuosity or skill (*Kunstfertigkeit*). Hence, fine art is acknowledged as good art if it is characterised by artistic quality and originality and constantly in progress towards enhancement.

or the Middle East, which are considered to be the new economic centres on the verge of forming new cultural hubs. While many countries like Great Britain or the United States with their traditional, “old” art centres in London or New York are currently in recession, various “new” markets are still showing positive growth, with rates of nine percent and six percent respectively in China and India in 2009.

My research engages in this shift from the “old” Euro-American art centres to the “new” art centres in the MENASA region (Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia) and in East Asia that have emerged since the 1990s and led to an era of contemporary art that transcends not only territories and forms new central hubs but initiates a paradigm shift towards a post-hegemonial, post-ethnic and post-Western notion of global art.

India and its booming art world is one of the most prominent examples of the recent developments of a global art scene and its shifting financial and cultural hubs. As international interest in contemporary “Indian art” has grown and an infrastructure has evolved since the 1990s, the art world in India has reached a new phase: Contemporary art from India has experienced an unprecedented boom on the global art market and exhibition hype inside and outside India. As a network of links among participants in art production, distribution, perception and consumption, the contemporary Indian art world stands for a local art world in the process of becoming global.

This article presents three hypotheses that exemplify the contemporary Indian art world as a suitable case study to examine the reciprocities of contemporary art in India, the global art market, and the role of the media. In tackling the broader question of the so-called globalization of art and its practices, I, firstly, argue that the art-sociological concept of the art world helps illustrate how globalization processes have formed a new geography of contemporary art, structurally decentralizing the cultural hegemony of the West when it comes to the location of biennials or art fairs. In observing recent developments in the current art world in India, I, secondly, register a structural change towards a differentiated, translocal art world, thereby constituting a new part of Indian society. Based on the assumption that the media is a player in the Indian art world that participates in the framework of reputation building processes of contemporary artists, I, thirdly, regard the Indian art world as currently being in a state of medialization.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term medialization as defined by Michael Meyen (2009): Medialization attempts to carve out the consequences of medially mediated public opinion, a structural change and a functional differentiation of the media. It focuses on the mode of actions of the media and the interchange with those who perceive media contents. Medialization thus implies the possibility of explaining changes through the expansion and development of communication media since the 1990s. As a new approach in media and communication

The article first addresses the notion of decentralization of the contemporary art world by providing a brief insight into the recent shift of the art market from “West” to “East” and by introducing the term “art world” as an art-sociological concept that seems particularly appropriate for tackling both the globalization and the medialization of contemporary art worlds. This is followed by a brief description of the rise and fall of the galleries Bodhi Art as an exemplary introduction to one of India’s prime art world players. The contemporary Indian art world is then portrayed as a new subsystem of Indian society, the focus being on the structural changes that have occurred during the last twenty years. The role of the media is singled out as one of the most prominent influences on the changes within the Indian art world, concluding that the relevance of the examination of contemporary art and medialization as exemplified by the Indian art world cannot be over-emphasized.

### **Towards a Decentralization of Art Worlds**

The rapid rise of biennials, international art fairs, symposia, artists and curators in residency programmes, as well as of contemporary museums and spectacular exhibitions in non-Western countries demonstrate what has been proclaimed as the globalization of art: visibility of and accessibility to art all over the globe. But what does this shift mean, what does it comprise? How are art worlds being affected by globalization?

Globalization, of course, is a multidimensional process and it is mainly the economic and cultural globalization which left its imprint on the new relation of art and the globality. The structural interconnectedness of the transnational markets, driven largely by the digitalization of the markets, generated an international art market that increasingly includes non-Western art, which led towards a cultural globalization of art and its practices. As Gerhard Preyer notes, cultural globalization refers primarily to the expansion of Western values and the incorporation of Western practices in non-Western spheres, especially in defining what fine art is supposed to be (Preyer 2006). But it also denotes the accessibility to and incorporation of non-Western practices, thought or goods in Western structures. Hence, the economic globalization of the art market has triggered the cultural globalization of the art worlds and led to its decentralization – as I will outline in the following.

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studies, the terms medialization and mediatization are still much debated. In contrast to medialization, mediatization – according to Friedrich Krotz (2007) – denotes that media are capable of changing human relations and behaviour and thus society and culture.

### **Shifting Hubs, Emerging Middle Classes**

The traditional structures of the art market have been changing significantly since the 1990s. For centuries, the art market was mainly built around the art centres of London, Paris, and New York and was thus under Western cultural hegemony. It was not until very recently that the art market became more differentiated due to economic and cultural globalization in the fields of art, crossed the borders of the United States and Europe and reached the economies of the emerging art market countries. Especially the trade with contemporary art has increased in the last twenty years, reaching its peak in 2008. This development is largely due to the rise of strong new emerging art markets like China, India, Russia, or the Middle East. I argue that the development of those powerful financial hubs has produced new cultural hubs. As strong economies produce consumer-oriented middle classes who are drawn to luxury markets like the art market, the emergence of a new category of buyers does not come as a surprise. These new buyers are interested in collecting and investing in contemporary art, primarily from their own countries. As the 2009 study of the European Fine Art Foundation on global art trends shows,

(c)ontemporary art has captured the interest of these buyers for a number of reasons: there is a continuing supply to the market, it resonates with their modern lifestyle, it is perceived to be fashionable, and can be traded freely in the absence of restrictions on the movement of art across national borders. The contemporary sector has been largely supported by the emergence of these new buyers. It is therefore the sector most at risk should the activities of these new buyers be reduced as a result of adverse economic conditions (McAndrew 2009: 13).

The increasing wealth of the emerging economies has triggered the emergence of new buyers in the international art market which in turn has produced an asymmetry: “While economic growth in some of the older Western economies has slowed in recent years, many of the emerging markets have shown strong and steady growth” (McAndrew 2009: 22). The growing wealth of these emerging economies has led to the growth of their art markets as their increasing national income leads to proportionally more consumption of luxury goods, including works of art. Since 2005, emerging art markets are making a significant impact on size, structure, dynamics, and prospects of the global art market. While the United States is traditionally the largest art market with a share of 41 percent and the United Kingdom has a share of 30 percent, China is already the third largest global art market with a share of 8 percent (McAndrew 2009: 13). Because of the purchasing power of their new wealthy buyers, the rise of a new collector type, the increasing supply of artworks to the market and the unprecedented trading opportunities,

emerging markets like India, Russia, or the Middle East have contributed to the major changes in the global art market since the 1990s.

This deterritorialization of the art market is a structural one, denoting a geographical shift of art centres and their practices towards non-Western countries. Due to its mechanisms and its digital existence, the art market – irrespective of its geographical location – serves as a globalising force in incorporating non-Western art in established, renowned Western structures. Still, the concept of fine art and how to “deal with art” remains largely Western, one which has – as I argue – just started to become theoretically post-Westernized due to the deterritorialization of the traditional, “old” art market centres. Considering the art market as merely one of several players that constitute the so-called art world, I will broaden the perspective by incorporating the new players.

### **Art Worlds: Seismograph of Modern Societies and Contemporary Art Practices in Times of Globalization**

In order to relate local practices and contexts to the global and contemporary art system, it seems appropriate to operate with the notion of the so-called art world. Most prominently examined by Arthur Danto (1964), George Dickie (1974), Howard S. Becker (1982), and Kitty Zijlmans (1995), an art world is defined as an almost enclosed entity that constitutes a part of society and consists of the following components: production, distribution, and reception/consumption. The well-established core players of the art world are thus artists, galleries, museums, curators, art critics, art schools, collectors, and auction houses – and as I will point out in the conclusion – the media.

Whereas the philosophers Danto and Dickie introduced the term with reference to art theory, the sociologist Howard S. Becker has assigned the art world to the discipline of sociology, more precisely of the sociology of art. Art historian Kitty Zijlmans takes this discussion a step further and defines the art world as one of Niklas Luhmann’s dynamic social systems, which categorizes the concept of the art world within the fields of systems theory.

The art world’s main purpose is to add symbolic and financial value to individual artefacts through reputation-building mechanisms that are mostly of communicative nature. As recent sociological studies (Beckert/Rössel 2004, Velthuis 2002) have shown, it is not expensive material or rare offers that determine the market value of contemporary art but its artistic reputation, which can only be produced communicatively from within the art world. These reputation-building mechanisms are responsible for the uncertainties and the obscurity contemporary art markets stand for: Instead of referring to

the quality of a specific material or a concept, artistic value is constructed by communication and by the reputation of those who communicate and hence make judgements about art. Thus, the media and their coverage of contemporary art are crucial in the context of the reputation building mechanisms of contemporary art. As the art world, especially the Indian art world, is dominated by communicative structures and the logic of the media, it constitutes a part of society that is strongly dependent on public perception and thus forms a basis for the examination of medialization processes within contemporary art worlds – as will be outlined towards the end of the article.

The existence of an art world is a feature of modern societies. Art itself serves as a constitutive factor for the self-images of modern societies and aesthetic questions provide a platform for analyzing transitions in modern cultures (Schwietring 2010). As a reflexive medium, art reacts to societal changes that enter the art world. As a subsystem of a society that reflects upon itself, art and its practices are consequently capable of indicating social change. The social changes that have been triggered through globalizing processes can therefore be illustrated by the analysis of an art world in transition. Conversely, an examination of an operating art world can give insight into societal change. Again, the mode of action of the media is crucial to the analysis of societal changes, an aspect that the concept of medialization is well aware of.

The emergence of non-Western art worlds since the 1990s also influenced the academic disciplines in their attempt to move towards a post-Western and post-Eurocentric definition of art. Since European art history traditionally circulates around the artistic objects themselves, the sociology of art undertook the task of examining the structures and contexts of those who produce, distribute, and consume art. Art sociology is still an internationally underrated and extremely specialized form of sociology, which has not yet received much academic attention. In order to decentralize art worlds, however, an art sociological perspective is necessary to put emphasis on the newly generated localities of the global art hubs. Art sociology is thus being challenged to relate Western concepts of art to the artistic practices of non-Western cultures, as well as to examine their historical and contemporary reciprocities (Schwietring 2010).

In conclusion, local art worlds that are seen as a confined subsystem of a society are an appropriate field of analysis for examining the shift towards a decentralized, global art world and its medialization. I define the contemporary art world in India as a new component of contemporary Indian society, which has changed significantly over the last twenty years, applying the notion of a structural change.

In order to gain an understanding of the relation of one of the “new” art hubs to the “old” centres that have exerted cultural hegemony for centuries, I conducted twenty qualitative, semi-structured interviews with key art world players in Mumbai. These serve partly as empirical data of this article. The sample that I am referring to in this article consists of seven key artists, seven key gallerists, five key authors and one collector each from New Delhi and Mumbai. It will become clear that the structural change in India’s art world is closely linked to the changes in the global art market, resulting in the dominance of purely commercial interests – something the majority of Indian art world players repeatedly complain about in their interviews. Another major component and source of my data is my former professional involvement in the contemporary Indian art world that included an intensive two-year participatory observation of the art world in India and its reception abroad: While setting up and later artistically running the international Indian gallery in Berlin, BodhiBerlin, I witnessed the contemporary Indian art boom at first hand, inside and outside India. In the following, I will use my expert knowledge of Bodhi Art as an exemplary case to illustrate the latest transition in the Indian art world. In addition, I will give a first glimpse into the results of the analysis of the semi-structured, qualitative interviews with key art world players.

### **The Contemporary Indian Art World: Structural Changes towards a Translocal Art World**

Before I start to outline my latest observations of the changes within the Indian art world, I would like to introduce a term that seems valid when dealing with the interchange between contemporary art, market and the media and will lead through the remaining article. I describe the structural change of the contemporary Indian art world as “translocal corrections”.

The term “translocality” (Freitag/von Oppen 2010) can be used where globalization debates have abandoned the term “glocalisation” (Robertson 1995): The emphasis on localities when engaging in global, transgressing perspectives. As a relatively new research perspective on the debates about globality, translocality implies the interaction and interconnectedness of locations, institutions, actors and concepts, which transcend national and territorial borders or fields of culture and thinking. Hence, it emphasizes the importance of differentiated localities in reciprocal relations when viewing from a global perspective. The concept seems particularly convincing as regards the media and the notion of deterritorialized and therefore decentralized art worlds: Andreas Hepp uses the term translocality in analysing media connectivity, stating on the one hand that “questions concerning all that is

local still matter but, on the other, that today's locales are connected physically and communicatively to a very high degree. And this is the reason why that which is local does not cease to exist, but rather *changes*" (Hepp 2004: 21). Relating the concept of translocality to "changes", the term alludes to various forms of fluidity, be it the transcending of fixed cultural identities, the crossing of national borders, or simply the delocalization of a practice or a thought and its re-embedding in another local context.

"Corrections", on the other hand, is a term that has been repeatedly used to describe the after-effects of the financial crisis on contemporary art and its practices since 2008. It derives from Latin *corrigere*: to rectify, to enhance, to amend, and implies the subsequent rectification of a part of an object or an action for improvement of the whole. Thus, corrections can be seen as countervailing forces that are applied when any kind of action or practice is in imbalance. Although the notion of correction is indeed an expression that seems applicable in almost every context, I nevertheless consider it as an appropriate figure of thought when examining what has been termed the "Indian art boom".

Translocal corrections thus indicate that an imbalance of transgressing or even already transgressed local actions is rectified in order to carve out changed localities that came into being as a consequence of a permeability attained when being exposed to the processes of globalization. It also denotes the de- as well as the re-localization of goods, practices or thoughts from the mode of the existing to that of the emerging. The notion of translocal corrections may thus function as a lens through which to observe the latest changes in the contemporary Indian art world, especially its entanglement with other localities in the global scene.

### **Introducing the Indian Art World: The Case of Bodhi Art**

In May 2008 – in the heyday of the international boom of contemporary "Indian Art" – one of Europe's first galleries presenting such art was set up in Berlin. BodhiBerlin was thus the most recent of the six branches of the most prominent Indian gallery Bodhi Art. Founded in 2004 in Singapore by an Indian dealer and collector, the gallery's aims were to present contemporary art from India to the global art market, to introduce the nation's artistic productions to a public hitherto unfamiliar with it, and to promote contemporary Indian art inside and outside the India.

Soon, Bodhi Art became extraordinarily successful and hence synonymous with representing contemporary art from India to the global art market and the interested public – be it private collectors or public institutions. Within a span of only four years (2004–2008), the gallery opened new branches in New Delhi, Mumbai, Singapore, New York, and Berlin. Its



market position was unique in that it both presented Indian contemporary art and reacted to its boom, thereby resembling a corporate culture: Bodhi Art was the first Indian gallery to react to the global interest in an emerging art market and increased the prices for contemporary Indian art by 50 percent. It thus decisively contributed to the creation of a (trans)national market for contemporary art from India, which had merely nascent for a couple of years previously. On the other hand, the professional, “corporate culture-like” actions of the gallery and its success in generating a new collector base in India and abroad fuelled the global interest in India’s art world as one of the “new kids on the block” of the global art market. Especially from 2006 onward, contemporary art from India was globally marketed as the next big thing and the next safe investment after the boom of contemporary Chinese art.<sup>3</sup>

FIGURE 1: Frontlines: Notations from the Contemporary Indian Urban, BodhiBerlin, 2008 (Installation shot, Image Copyright: Berthold Stadler)



Apart from functioning as a market-serving and a market-constituting company, Bodhi Art became a role model gallery for the Indian art world: Through informative wall texts, well designed catalogues and high quality publications as well as interactive sessions with the artists and gallery talks,

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<sup>3</sup> Such predicaments have been realized by companies like Art Tactic Limited, which has been set up to monitor the art market and provide orientation on the value of artists and their art.

the three branches in India significantly altered how exhibitions were displayed and how information was disseminated to an interested public. By operating with a clear corporate identity, the galleries portrayed themselves as professional companies that handle the art business on a global scale. The affinity to the Euro-American notion of what a gallery is supposed to stand for became visible, serving as an example to be imitated, which in turn triggered off several of the structural changes in the gallery system in India. Before long, Bodhi Art presented almost all of the most important blue-chip mid-career artists<sup>4</sup> India had to offer, raised the prices of their art exorbitantly and exposed their works to the global art market as well as to institutions, galleries, and audiences abroad, nearly all of them reacting positively to Bodhi Art's translocal corrections.

FIGURE 2: Shilpa Gupta: *I have many dreams*, 2008 (detail), 4 photographs on canvas with sound, 168 x137cm each (Installation shot at BodhiBerlin, Image Copyright: Berthold Stadler)



As the most prominent symbol of the art market boom, Bodhi Art became the most prominent victim of the market crash in 2009, having closed all galleries due to financial problems within only one year. It was assumed that

<sup>4</sup> Among them were Subodh Gupta, Shilpa Gupta, Anju and Atul Dodiya, Reena Saini and Jitish Kallat, Raghu Rai, Riyas Komu, Anita Dube, Nalini Malani, Zarina Hashmi, Sudarshan Shetty.

their closure was mainly due to the enormous rise in the artists' prices, which was hard to correct so soon after their successful entry into the global market. Despite the void the gallery left in the Indian art scene, it can be considered one of the most important local corrections the Indian art world has witnessed in becoming global: It changed the national as well as the international market for contemporary "Indian" art and triggered actions within the artistic field that can be seen as an exemplary reaction by a local art world in transition.

FIGURE 3: Subodh Gupta: *Faith Matters*, 2007 (detail), Sushi belt, brass copper, aluminium and steel, 167,6 x 462,3 x 264,2 cm (Installation shot at BodhiBerlin, Image Copyright: Berthold Stadler)



### **The Indian Art Boom and its Translocal Corrections**

The artist Subodh Gupta has become the most expensive and celebrated contemporary artist from India without having successfully exhibited in the country. Disregarded in India, he had worked ten years for European galleries which eventually succeeded in drawing global attention to his artefacts.

From 2005 to 2008, in the heyday of the Indian art boom, the artist saw his prices increase fifty-two fold. In 2008, one of his works crossed the \$1 million mark at auction sales. Boosted as well as hailed by the media in India, Subodh Gupta's sudden global breakthrough was prompted by two incidents: by appearing on the global art market and by successfully participating in the global art world with its differentiated reputation-building mechanisms. His quick, glamorous career inside and outside India exemplifies the paradoxical situation of the contemporary Indian art world: By turning outward to the global art world and by joining the global art market, contemporary art from India has simultaneously become of Western and of national interest.

Like in other emerging art market countries, globalization processes, economic change, and the emergence of a new middle class as potential collectors have had major impacts on the structure and self-image of the contemporary art world in India. Artworks from India reached the highest prices on the global art market, exhibitions that featured contemporary art from India travelled the world, and being an artist became a fashionable career aspiration. In short: India's contemporary art world experienced its own globalization with its media documenting and generating it at the same time.

India's economic liberalization, officially introduced in 1991, enabled a profound boost in globalization processes that rapidly changed the country. While 25 percent of the population is still extremely poor, living off only one dollar per day, the new middle class that has emerged constitutes a large consumer mass interested in the Western lifestyle. As Christiane Brosius (2010) and Leela Fernandes (2006) have shown, the media in India is mainly responsible for distributing and promoting new capitalist trends in Indian society. The consumption of contemporary art from India, manifest in attendance of art vernissages by an elite as social events or in collecting contemporary art to obtain an intellectually tinted luxury item, is certainly one of such media-promoted trends.

My research results suggest a strong functional differentiation of the Indian art worlds as well as an increased entanglement with other art worlds on the basis of participation in international art fairs or biennials. From a first analysis of my data collection, it is apparent that since the 1990s the

globalization and hence decentralization of the art worlds via the art market have significantly affected the Indian art world, resulting in an accelerated differentiation of its participants, its structures, and the logic of its functioning.

I have categorized my research results in the following two hypotheses: (1) Whereas the art world of Indian Modernity was characterized by lively, content-driven debates within Indian art circles, discussion in the contemporary art world is dominated by a media logic that resembles that of celebrity culture and the PR mechanisms of corporate cultures. (2) Whereas the art world of Indian Modernity was characterized by a limited exhibition presence on an international level, and by only a small national market, the current art world is becoming a differentiated subsystem of society dominated by the mechanisms of the art market due to the lack of a corrective museum culture.

#### (1) Towards a Media Logic of Corporate and Celebrity Culture?

Up until the mid 1990s, India's art world was primarily occupied with its own thematic discourses. Thematic foci of the debates on Modernity and Modernism in Indian art were movements characterized by autonomy and emancipation from the previous ones like for example the Bengal School. Such debates were led by an elite, small but very critical, and by an intellectually active circle of middle class individuals. Their aim was to discuss Modernism and Modernity in Indian art in its distinction from a European derivative of the Modernist discourse.<sup>5</sup>

Paradoxically, the critical discourse on contemporary art seemed to have faded at a time when the globalization of communication and hence the increasing medialization of Indian society was experiencing a major impetus. As art critics and other art professionals from India pointed out during the interviews, intellectual or academic discourses on current topics of the contemporary Indian art world are as good as non-existent at the beginning of the new millennium. Those interviewees who already worked in the field during the 1990s remember lively intellectual disputes about artistic practices in India, referring to them as encapsulated, private and oral exchanges among the intellectual elite. The support of high-quality art reviews and art historical essays published in daily news papers like *The Times of India* or in specialized magazines like the *Journal of Arts and*

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<sup>5</sup> When talking about "Indian Art", the discourse of previous generations of artists in India was long entangled in controversies about Modernism and Modernity and India's artistic participation in or exclusion therefrom as Yashodhara Dalmia (2001, 2007), Partha Mitter (2007), and Geeta Kapur (2000) have shown.

*Ideas*, made participants in the emerging art world of the 1990s satisfied with the media coverage of modern and contemporary art.

All interviewees agreed upon a significant change of the discourse on art. Nowadays, few magazines are still committed to providing profound art criticism or quality exhibition reviews – despite the boom of quarterly art magazines in India. Most interviewees attribute this to editorial attempts to introduce more new readers to the topic of modern and contemporary art, hence trying to extend their readership to a less elite and more mainstream public: Less intellectual and more celebrity and market-driven text types facilitate easier access for those who have no background in art. Another reason is that most of the writers are young, enthusiastic art professionals who, for the most part, have more than one occupation: they are simultaneously artists, writers, curators, consultants, or gallerists. Such multiple professions – as was frequently pointed out in the course of the interviews – often result in restrained writing as the clash of interests on various levels may lead to thematic compromises. Furthermore, most interviewees agreed that many writers seem to lack an art historical or art theoretical training due to the generally limited presence of the disciplines of art history, theory, and criticism in India.

Parallel to the commercialization of Indian life, the media now adopts the strategy of using contemporary art as representative of a market-oriented Indian middle class which has been introduced to contemporary art as a commodity. Instead of critical or substantial debates, the media promoted a PR and marketing-style of communication when covering contemporary art. Intellectual art magazines like the prominent *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, edited by Geeta Kapur, were discontinued due to lack of readership. In general, daily or weekly profound art criticism and reviews, as existed in a couple of daily newspapers, were hastily replaced by art advertisements and commercially driven reviews of exhibitions and artists. As several gallerists pointed out, the necessity and willingness to spend money on advertisement of the business has increased since the 1990s. While the readership of articles on modern and contemporary art seems unchanged in numbers, advertisements for art have increased tremendously. This observation reflects the stabilization of the national and the emergence of the international market for contemporary art from India. Both processes are dependent on public visibility and attention, which is achieved by specialist magazines, the daily newspapers' columns on art and of course various media formats in the internet.

The internet itself plays a vital role in the contemporary art world in India. It was repeatedly mentioned by the interviewees that the immediacy of media formats like blogs counterbalances the topics dealt with in quarterly magazines, which too often seem to be behind the times. As one inter-

viewee rightly pointed out: “Who is interested in an exhibition review of a gallery show which happened three months ago when you have in mind that the average gallery show in India lasts for four weeks?”. Furthermore, it is interesting to observe how individual art world actors like collectors use the internet, mostly in the format of blogs, to announce their latest art purchase, to discuss the sustainability of the artist or to recommend and present emerging artists to other collectors and those interested.

The internet fills in where the print media lags behind. The website “Mumbai Boss” is one of the new “holistic” online platforms that provide information for Mumbai, offering a variety of categories like news, events, food and nightlife, shopping, fashion, and culture. As one of its editors stated, the idea is to make the art world accessible to a larger public, to a readership which is living the new life of the urban middle class with all its items including contemporary art. The translation of this idea can be seen, as has been noticed by the key art world players, in the strategy of the website when covering art: the articles are well researched, easy to read for non art world readers and still cover what it is about: the artefacts themselves and why it is worth looking at them.

Yet in general, the recent discussions about art – both online and in print – are characterised by the commercial aspect of the art world. Most of the documented disputes focus on questions like “what was sold for how much?” or “what is the market value of the artist?” and are hence an apt indicator of the transitions that a local art world experiences when becoming translocal, its motor being the global art market.

## (2) Towards a Differentiated Indian Art Industry

Due to the global interest, the distributing system of the Indian art world, which is mainly comprised of galleries, curators, or critics, has become increasingly more differentiated. During the last fifteen years, the idea of curating contemporary art has evolved, and spread within the urban art centres of India, culminating in thematic and catalogue-accompanied exhibitions that express the – mostly sociological – concerns of their artists. Such visibility of modern and contemporary Indian art and the circulation of texts from India on current artistic practices led to significant foreign curatorial interest which climaxed in showcasing travelling exhibitions that allegedly carve out the cultural identity of India.

Already touched upon with reference to Bodhi Art, the gallery system professionalized and evolved from being a small niche in art trade and art presentation in the 1990s to being the gate keeper of the contemporary Indian art world. Unlike other art world participants who mostly hold a multiple profession profile, galleries largely concentrate on fulfilling the challenging task of producing a good reputation for their artists, of hosting

curated exhibitions as well as of positioning their artists and themselves on the art market, preferably on the global one. Was it the 1954-founded NGMA, the National Gallery of Modern Art, in New Delhi, which was solely responsible for presenting young artists until the late 1980s, the commercial galleries from the 1990s onwards focused on presenting and positioning emerging artists to the interested public, professionalizing their national and international trade and mission. This can be seen as a major correction, as the scene clearly lacked a similar structure and was dependent on external cultural forces like the Goethe Institutes which played a leading role in supporting the modern and contemporary art scene until the beginning of the millennium.

In comparison to other art worlds, however, the contemporary Indian art world mainly relies on foreign players like international art fairs or biennials and the domestic commercial private sector. State institutions are practically absent or are marginal to the artistic developments of the country. The Indian art world lacks not only museums for modern and contemporary art, but most important a museum culture<sup>6</sup> itself: a public engagement with a public space that collects, cares for, and studies objects which are considered relevant for the nation. Aiming to educate in the areas of history, aesthetics, and visuality, the existence of a museum culture enables all kinds of people to learn and experience what is relevant to the state. As museums appear to be independent of private interests and are traditionally not “allowed” to resell their artefacts, the presence within a museum is the highest reputation an object of art can acclaim. Discussions of exhibitions on show in museums in the West are generally referred to in the daily newspapers and are often regarded as national debates on national affairs. Museums are thus seen as a corrective to the commercial side of the art world as they are allegedly free from private interests but serve the public. Since museum culture in India is still in the making, commercial galleries take on the important task of representing, contextualizing, and positioning the artistic field. Against this backdrop, it seems that it is the art market and its actors that provide the criteria for the quality of contemporary art, as Kavita Singh (2010) has outlined in a recent article in *The Art News Magazine of India*. Is it the art market that builds reputation and thus the symbolic and monetary value of contemporary art in India?

What Isabelle Graw has generally stated in her book *High Price: Art Between the Market and Celebrity Culture* (2008) also applies to the current

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<sup>6</sup> In stating the lack of a museum culture, I am aware that it is a mainly Western concept of representing art to the public. As we are operating on the basis of a structural translocality at least, I nevertheless consider it appropriate in that it is the market which dominates the Indian art world.



scene in India: regarding the latest changes, it seems more appropriate to use the term art industry than that of an art world. From the perspective of structural changes, contemporary art has become a commodity, an investment asset. The new defining power of the art market on a global scale and the monopoly of the private economic sector in the Indian art market lead naturally to the following hypothesis and my concluding remarks on the role of the media in relation to the art industry: Contemporary art from India is being subjected to commodification, a trend that is much more visible in India than for example in Germany due to the absence of a balancing museum culture and the lack of critical textual corrections in the commercialization of art.

More than anything else, it is the commercial success and the quantity of the media coverage that have become a criterion of artistic reputation, in India, but most probably anywhere in the world. Market success and media coverage seem to have become a quality criterion, a precondition for the inclusion of an artist or a work of art in the canon of contemporary art.

### **The New Role of the Media in Relation to Contemporary Art Worlds**

Media permeates contemporary society to such an extent that their symbiotic relationship opens up a research field for investigating social change in particular. The study of media in relation to culture and society receives ever greater attention and the focus is becoming more sociological aimed at gaining an understanding of the reciprocal relation between media content production and media content consumption, the implication being that communication and thus social actions orientate themselves according to the logic of the media. The question to be addressed is: How have society and culture changed their structures, functions or their character in response to the permeation of everyday life by the media?

Currently two main concepts dominate this field of study: mediatization and medialization. Among the most prominent representatives of the concept of mediatization is Friedrich Krotz who considers it comparable to the meta processes reflected in globalization or individualization (Krotz 2007). In arguing that the media is changing the daily life and thus “reality” of a society, Krotz conceives of mediatization as an ongoing meta process, whereby the media has the power to transform human relations and behaviour and thus change society and culture. As stated in the beginning, I use the connotations of the concept of medialization in this article as defined by Michael Meyen. According to him the concept of medialization focuses on the question if and how knowledge, emotions, behaviour, and attitude are

influenced by media dynamics. Reciprocal effects of media and society are thus core elements of studying medialization processes (Meyen 2009).

With regard to my latest observations of the Indian art world, I am interested in the relation of media, contemporary art and reputation building mechanisms. But rather than investigating the impact of media on the artefact itself, I am more concerned with the constitutive role of the media in the art world. Taking into consideration that the value of art is both collectively and socially constructed from within the art world before it enters the art market, it is surprising that an art sociological perspective on the relation of media and contemporary art has been neglected so far. Since the network of participants of art production, distribution, and reception/ consumption is to a large extent based on communication (according to Arthur Danto, art exists only because it is communicated as art by people who constitute the art world), the media can be seen as one of the most significant players in the entire network. I hence assume that in incorporating the media as a player in the art world, the boundaries of artistic production, distribution, and reception/consumption will become blurred as they will on the one hand embody each and every single one of these players but nevertheless still follow the same logic. In this light, the media could be considered as a social institution in itself that simultaneously generates as well as orients on the logic of the reputation building processes of an art world.

The concept of the medialization of art worlds should address not only the reciprocal influences of media, art market and artistic practices but also empirically examine art worlds in order to outline their translocal characters. Even though the Indian art world is “physically located” on Indian territory, its market as well as its discourses are nevertheless digital and in consequence transcend the national territory. This does not, of course, deny the fact that current art hubs in Basel or London are traditionally connoted as culturally more dominant or valuable than art hubs in Dubai or New Delhi. But it suggests that medially mediated public communication on art from India transcends its local context and merges with other localities and their artistic practices (Hepp 2009).

As the contemporary Indian art world is only emerging and still small but nonetheless already a subsystem of Indian society, it is a promising research field for applying the concept of medialization to art. As Nadja-Christina Schneider has shown, economic liberalization processes in India have evolved in an unprecedented medialization of Indian society (Schneider 2005). Especially in a transformative society like India, Schneider proposes an “observation of those observers that observe the world” and hence states the relevance of media as meaning-making processors of contemporary cultures (Schneider 2005). Considering media as global meaning-makers

due to their timely reaction on so-called “topics of conjuncture”, I presume that the contemporary art world in India has not only consciously experienced but also generated its own globalization towards a translocal art world. The tremendous media revolution that India has witnessed since the 1990s (Schneider 2005) is particularly obvious within the Indian art world: The boom of contemporary art in India has triggered excessive media coverage inside and outside the country, which needs to be analyzed on various levels and perhaps even comparatively.

The number and types of press releases that highlight art as a glamorous luxury item and the critical debates that followed the media coverage in the West lead me to describe the recent changes in the contemporary Indian art world as a transnational media event. Media events have the capacity to constitute hubs that are characterized by a communicative densification. As they trigger waves of reception to what they have been broadcasting or distributing to the public, media events generate and structure new fields of publicity in various parts of society. The existence of an event of any kind is dependent on its coverage by the media. Only the medialization of an event and the societal, communicative reaction to it constitute an “event”. According to Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz (Dayan/Katz 1992), current media events can be characterized as “live broadcasting of history” – a statement which aptly captures one of the most important changes of the Indian and other emerging art worlds.

If an art world gives reason to believe that the media, as a participant in the network of artistic production, distribution, and consumption, is central to the meaning-making processes of knowledge and value production, it seems only natural to analyze it not only as a transnational media event but also as translocal media culture. The first findings from my actor-centric research on the contemporary art world in India suggest that both concepts, translocality and medialization, seem to be less a promising possibility but a necessity to investigate its specific patterns of artistic thought, discourse and actions. In order to detect what it means to proclaim the beginning of the medialization of translocal art worlds, in India and elsewhere, one has to take the study from here.

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