

## The Arts, Fine Arts and Art in General

In this chapter I want to revisit the philosophical inquiry into the ontology of art from the perspective of the politics of labour. The question ‘what is art?’ is novel in the eighteenth century because this question is either absurd or trivial when addressed to the several specific arts (painting, sculpture, literature, music, etc.) either collectively or individually. We can ask what is painting, what is sculpture, what is poetry and so on, but these have a technical specificity prior to the advent of art in general. As such, the ontological question of art is precipitated by the emergence of the abstract and general concept of art charted in the previous chapter. In this chapter I will investigate the advent of art in general (more accurately, art in the singular and general) through a reconstruction of struggles over the kind of labour involved in the production of works of art.<sup>1</sup>

First, a snapshot of how the concept of art is understood conceptually – that is to say, in the absence of an analysis of transformation of the relations of production that took place in the passage from the arts of painting, sculpture, music and poetry to art in general. The ontology of art is posed by the Jena Romantics as the question ‘what is literature?’ not narrowly as one of several arts but with an unprecedented generality: ‘art considered as literature ... [and] literature considered as the essence of art.’<sup>2</sup> The early German Romantic philosophers, therefore, both laid the foundations of the modern theory of art and gave new impetus to the fledgling discipline of art criticism. The practice of art criticism, which Niklas Luhmann calls ‘the self-description of the art system’,<sup>3</sup> was integral to this new isolated, self-conscious and universal conception of art. ‘The emergence of criticism, inseparably tied to that of aesthetics, puts an end to the ancient, objective representation of the beautiful.’<sup>4</sup> Aesthetic philosophy and art criticism are required when ‘the fact that there is music or sculpture in a society does not mean that art is constituted as an independent category.’<sup>5</sup>

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- 1 The phrase ‘work of art’ was used to refer to the products of the mechanical and liberal arts and continues to be used as a synonym for ‘artwork’, a term which was coined only with the birth of the concept of art in general, which I am tracing here.
  - 2 Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1988, p. 83.
  - 3 Luhmann 2000, p. 286.
  - 4 Ferry 1993, p. 45.
  - 5 Rancière 2004, p. 51.

The qualities of art in general correspond to the imputed qualities of a particular type of producer – the artist. While prior to the eighteenth century, there was no such thing as artistic labour *as such*, only the specific skills of painting, carving, printing, drawing and so on, by the beginning of the nineteenth century the producer of art was no longer conceived of as a worker at all but as a special kind of subject. The artist comes to exemplify the fulfilment of a certain conception of the subject because he – rarely she – is increasingly understood during the eighteenth century to be engaged in artistic labour in general rather than one of the various Fine Arts. The disciplines of painting, sculpture, music and poetry continue to structure art in general but practitioners of each discipline now consider themselves to be artists rather than painters, sculptors, musicians or poets.

The difference between painting (or sculpting or composing) as an art and painting (or sculpting or composing) as art is codified in the concept of the artist, as distinct from the artisan, through a formulation of the labour of the production of art as an emblem of freedom. Artistic labour, or the labour of producing art in general rather than one of the several specific arts, is initially conceived of as an eruption of the individual subject through the crust of convention, tradition, academia, mastery and market demand. The artist is not modelled on conceptions of work but character. The escalation and abstraction necessary for the transition from questions of handicraft to questions of subjecthood itself reaches its peak in the notion of the genius but it is not eliminated by talking about the artist or the artist as producer instead.

Art does not emerge from the arts in a once and for all rupture – a revolution of the means of production or a seizure of control over who controls artistic production – but according to an uneven and combined development. It is important to note, for instance, that art in general does not emerge first in Italy or Holland where merchant capitalism and the art of painting had been dominant from the Renaissance until the seventeenth century. Although the erstwhile centres of the arts of painting and sculpture retained their status even as they were being eclipsed by developments elsewhere, the consolidation of the attempt to elevate painting and sculpture above handicraft took place in France in the seventeenth century, and the transition from the Fine Arts to art in general was pioneered in the German-speaking principalities and in England.

Insofar as I am concerned above all with transformations in the social relations of artistic production, I do not take my cues from a sequential history of the quality of artworks or the rise of national and regional schools, nor is this historical investigation into the changing social relations of artistic produc-

tion narrated through the evidence these social changes leave on the surface of artworks (in changes of style and content, for instance) or insofar as they are embodied in artistic technique. In this sense, I am interested less in what individual artists do in their studios than I am in the historical formation of the studio itself.

Hence, the metamorphosis of artistic production that I am tracing is, in important respects, a spatial or geographical process. When I speak of art's social relations of production, therefore, I have in mind the spatial organisation of artistic labour and the spaces in which artistic labour takes place and through which artworks are circulated. The so-called transition from patronage to the art market, therefore, might be more accurately understood as the transition from the artisanal workshop to the artist's studio, or better still from the integration of a range of activities within the guild workshop to the spatial dispersal of activities that come to take place within and between the studio, gallery, art school, museum, fabricators workshop and all the supply chains that provide their tools, machinery and materials.

In order to insert the historical transformation of artistic labour into the changing world system during the contested transition to the capitalist mode of production, I want to suggest that the arts, the Fine Arts and art in general need to be distinguished with some clarity. In order to get to grips with the historical transformation of artistic labour during the passage from the guild system to the gallery system, the decisive changes in the transition are not discursive or terminological but configurational or relational. Hence, I will say, distinct social configurations of artistic labour can be identified and they produce distinctive discursive formations and modifications of the vocabulary. Evidently, these terms do not go out of use once a new social form of artistic production has been developed and so they appear, more often than not, as synonyms. I will use these terms somewhat unnaturally, therefore, as having a more distinct referent than common use allows. My aim is not to police the language or to impose conceptual clarity on a contingent reality but to highlight discursive changes that parallel and contribute to changes in the social makeup of artistic labour.

How does art in general emerge from the manifold specific arts? Kristeller says '[t]he various arts are certainly as old as human civilization, but the manner in which we are accustomed to group them and to assign them a place in our scheme of life and of culture is comparatively recent',<sup>6</sup> pointing out that the modern 'system of the five major arts ... did not assume definite shape before

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6 Kristeller 1990, p. 226.

the eighteenth century',<sup>7</sup> namely in Charles Batteux's *The Fine Arts Reduced to a Single Principle*. Nevertheless, Kristeller clearly says it 'seems to emerge gradually and after many fluctuations in the writings of authors who were in part of but secondary importance'.<sup>8</sup> 'In the course of history', he says, 'the various arts change not only their content and style ... but also their relations to each other, and their place in the general system of culture'.<sup>9</sup>

Kristeller privileges theoretical contributions over social transformations. Three of the five arts that would be grouped as the Fine Arts in the Batteux's writing in the eighteenth century 'were for the first time clearly separated from the crafts' in the Renaissance triumvirate of painting, sculpture and architecture. Although this does not match his template for the modern grouping of the Fine Arts, Kristeller acknowledges its significance within the history of the gradual formulation of the modern order of the arts. Even so, Kristeller traces this historical step as a discursive innovation, namely Vasari's theory of the *Arti del disegno*. It is this 'change in theory', he argues, that later 'found its institutional expression in 1563 when in Florence ... the painters, sculptors and architects cut their previous connections with the craftsmen's guilds and formed the Academy of Art (*Accademia del Disegno*)'.

Although, today, the academy is generally considered to be an institution that occupies a building, initially academies were events. Like symposia, seminars and lectures, academies were a certain kind of assembly rather than a place in which groups assembled. The first academies in sixteenth-century Italy were elite literary associations that discussed Latin and vernacular poetry.<sup>10</sup> Giorgio Vasari's *Accademia delle Arti del Disegno* mimicked these in a calculated bid to pierce the dividing line between the mechanical and liberal arts. Academies of Painting and Sculpture, which appeared in seventeenth century France, modelled themselves on their Italian predecessors and for precisely the same strategic purpose. Kristeller's argument that the academies of the sixteenth and seventeenth century 'replaced the older workshop tradition with a regular kind of instruction that included such scientific subjects as geometry and anatomy',<sup>11</sup> derives from Nikolaus Pevsner's study of the academies.

Decisive for Kristeller is the culture of reception for the arts. It was the development of the 'amateur tradition' that brought these arts together, not grouped around their techniques of production or pedagogical processes but the nature

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7 Kristeller 1990, p. 165.

8 Kristeller 1990, p. 196.

9 Kristeller 1990, p. 226.

10 See Kristeller 1951, p. 511.

11 Ibid.

of their consumption. Poetry, music and painting were ‘grouped together as pursuits appropriate for the courtier, the gentleman, or the prince’,<sup>12</sup> and therefore these arts were seen as having an affinity because of the similarity of their ‘effect upon the amateur’.<sup>13</sup> The conflation of art with the Fine Arts, like the anachronism of treating the Renaissance as the origin of the modern category of art, depends upon the analysis of concepts and categories in the literature that resonate with modern discourses of art.

For the history of ideas and similar methodologies this appears to be sufficient but an analysis of the mode of production for works of art requires a different kind of analysis. Kristeller’s notion of a ‘grouping’ puts a strong emphasis on processes of categorisation but is rooted methodologically in the history of ideas and his account documents above all a rift in discourse. Kristeller does not explain the inception of this modern grouping of the arts through the establishment of the modern institutions of art, changes in their economic structuring or in broader social ruptures, as a social historian of art would, although he mentions the ‘founding of the Academies’<sup>14</sup> in seventeenth-century France and elsewhere only insofar as they seem to represent an acknowledgement of the grouping of the five Fine Arts, which he dismisses as ‘apparent rather than real’.<sup>15</sup> Kristeller confines himself to the theoretical grasping of the concept of the Fine Arts whereas my analysis focuses on the historical transformations of the social relations of the production of works of art.

Kristeller did not pursue the historical passage from the arts to art in general any further than the development of the Fine Arts, saying ‘the term “Art” comprises above all the five major arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, music and poetry’.<sup>16</sup> Larry Shiner, however, extends the historical passage that Kristeller narrates to include later developments in which ‘the replacement of patronage by an art market and a middle-class public’,<sup>17</sup> took place as part of the development of ‘more general relations of power and gender’.<sup>18</sup> Shiner has plotted some of the key elements of the development of art out of the arts within the broader development of capitalism. Like Kristeller’s stress on the classification of the arts, Shiner focuses on the circulation and consumption of artworks rather than transformations to the mode of artistic production.

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12 Kristeller 1990, p. 185.

13 Ibid.

14 Kristeller 1990, p. 191.

15 Ibid.

16 Kristeller 1990, pp. 164–5.

17 Shiner 2001, p. 7.

18 Ibid.

The emergence of the category of Fine Arts, charted by Kristeller and others, not only needs to be inserted into the colonial world system in which the Fine Arts and later art in general operate as a world system of culture, they need to be woven into the broader social history of the transformation of manufacturing that consisted of the collapse of the guilds and livery companies with the consequent elimination of the arts as a mode of production. While this transition of production is commonly narrated as an internal development within Western Europe as the passage from feudalism to capitalism, it is vital that the transition from the arts to art is lodged within the formation of a world system of uneven and combined development.

Instead of contrasting the artisan with the artist in terms of some purported superiority in quality or inspiration, I will examine differences in the social relations of labour that take a specific spatial configuration. I do not define the artisan or the artisanal with a certain type of labour process – highly skilled, specialist, handwork with tools, etc. – but with a certain social and spatial organisation of labour. Artisanal production, historically speaking, takes place in a workshop occupied not only by an artisan but also apprentices and day-labourers. The modern craftsperson, therefore, who works alone and purchases materials and tools from suppliers, is not an artisan from the perspective of the social relations of production. Artisan painters, for instance, serve apprentices in which they learn to grind their own paints, make their own pencils and so forth, and go on, as master artisans, to have apprentices and artisan day-labourers complete these tasks for them. In that respect, the spatial condition for artisanal production is the workshop.

The politics of labour in the production of works of art is mediated in the Renaissance through the rhetorics of the mechanical and liberal arts which gave provisional value to handicraft but a higher value to design, composition, invention and judgement. Normally these processes would bracket handicraft (setting it up and finishing it off) but in remarkable instances, they would run through handicraft itself, transforming it into something divine. The struggle between the guild and the court took a specific shape in the Renaissance in which certain individuals secured their emancipation from the guilds through the establishment of a number of small academies operating within the guild system. This struggle takes on another specific shape with the emergence of the Fine Arts.

What is at stake in the disagreement about whether the modern figure of the artist is born in the Renaissance or art in general emerges in the eighteenth century or through the voluntary deskilling of the artist in the twentieth and so forth, is the question of the social forces at play in art's institutional differentiation from handicraft. Instead of searching through the historical documents

for the turning point or the single event or the exemplary figure that signals the advent of the modern category of art, it is vital to understand the transition from the arts to the Fine Arts and to art in general as an historical process in which the contestation over the mode of production for works of art is played out. My extrapolation of the timescale of the transition from handicraft to art *via* the Fine Arts deliberately refutes the (implied) claim that art is formed by great individuals (philosophers, artists, art critics) and the (false) impression that the change occurs through a process that resembles a decision. I am thinking, here, of how the standard narratives of the 'invention of art', the elimination of handicraft in art or the development of 'art in general' appear as single episodes or the delayed results of single episodes. In some cases, Romanticism is the name given to the episode in question, and in others it is art's commodification or Duchamp's readymades.

So, while the terms art, Fine Art, the Fine Arts and the arts are commonly used as roughly interchangeable today, I am assigning them to different modes of artistic production within an historical struggle over artistic labour that has already lasted five hundred years. The arts, for my purposes, are all the handicraft trades organised within the guild system. The Fine Arts consist of a certain grouping of the arts that have been elevated above the guild in an indeterminate location between the mechanical arts and the liberal arts. Art is abstracted from the Fine Arts and therefore is not reducible to any but retains an affinity with them all as well as including their negation and an infinity of techniques outside them.

When writers refer to the transition from patronage to the art market, for instance, without describing the protracted social processes through which this transition was accomplished and contested, the effect is to imply that there is regime change in art's social relations. Perhaps the intention is to imply that the French Revolution or the bourgeois revolutions in general brought about a revolutionary overthrow of relations of patronage in art which were replaced with a laissez-faire system of the market at the speed of the guillotine? I may even have subscribed to such a view at the outset of my study. Certainly, I underestimated the scale and complexity of the historical disaggregation of art from handicraft as well as the extent to which this remains an unfinished project or a persistent condition for the politics of labour in art. The elimination of handicraft from the artwork and therefore from studio practice presupposes the separation of the artist in the studio (which is to say the transition from the artisanal workshop to the artist's studio has already taken place), and that the artisanal elements of artistic production (grinding of paints, manufacture of pencils and paper, framing and so on) have been expelled from the studio and are no longer the responsibility of the artist. The exodus from

the studio and the modern and contemporary form of critical vigilance called 'deskilling', in which generation after generation of artists unearth countless traces of handicraft within artistic technique itself, demonstrate that this historical struggle over art's mode of production is ongoing and remains politically significant.

The period of the transformation of the arts into art *via* the Fine Arts runs from the Middle Ages to the beginning of the nineteenth century. This is unwieldy and necessitates an episodic approach. Taking my cue from the Marxist concept of the wage system, I will distinguish between three systems of artistic production. The guild system forms part of the feudal mode of production in the urban centres of Europe in which the arts are hierarchically ordered into the liberal arts and the mechanical arts. The academy system, which has precedents in Classical Greece and has its roots in the Renaissance, is systematised in the middle of the seventeenth century in France and is rolled out across Europe in the following century as the principal institutional apparatus of the Fine Arts. The gallery system, which is not reducible to the art market, consists primarily of the modern division of labour that separates the artist as a specialist from the dealer, critic, professor, supplier of art materials, assistant, technician, and so on.

Although the guild system precedes the academy system, one does not immediately replace the other and they form a specific dual system from the middle of the seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth century. Prior to the emergence of the academy system the guild system operated within a dual system of guild and court. Similarly, the academy system survives the inauguration of the gallery system and they operate for some time as a second dual system. And when the academies are fully incorporated into the gallery system, the gallery system reveals itself to be a new dual system of market and public.

As well as overlapping and contesting one another, the various systems of artistic production preserve and rejuvenate elements that were developed previously. One example of this, which I will focus on in more detail later, is the transposition of the hostility to commerce that is present in the Renaissance court system and formalised into an imperative within the academy system and eventually reiterated within bohemianism and the avant-garde within the gallery system. However, it is important to acknowledge that the hostility to commerce is first formed as part of the bid to elevate painting and sculpture from the mechanical art to the liberal arts according to an aristocratic ethos of activity. Although displays of the antipathy to the market by painters and sculptors from the Renaissance to French Revolution resemble the anti-capitalist and anti-bourgeois protests of modernity, the former has to be understood as a pre-capitalist affirmation of nobility.



Although the historical sketch that I have just provided is inadequate in many ways and cannot hope to summarise the contested histories of the organisation of the arts, the Fine Arts and art in general across several centuries, I present it as a preliminary model of how to inquire into the historical transition from the guild organisation of the mechanical arts to the gallery system of modern and contemporary art. Despite its shortcomings, I want to highlight two advantages of studying the historical formation of art in general in terms of rival and superseding systems. First, it calls for a reconstruction of the specific forms of social organisation of art (or the arts or the Fine Arts) rather than overstate the significance of the intellectual origin of key ideas. And second, it calls for a differentiation of the institutions of art (or the arts or the Fine Arts) rather than to conflate them, as is done, arguably, in both the institution theory of art and the contemporary discourses of institutional critique.

Naturally, the terms that I am differentiating here in order to signify changes in the social configuration of artistic labour are usually merged with one another. James O. Young, for instance, conflates the Fine Arts with art in general, using the phrase 'Batteux's ideas on the concept of art'<sup>19</sup> to refer to Batteux's theory of the Fine Arts without verifying whether Batteux also regarded art to be a synonym of the Fine Arts. Shiner also slips into treating the Fine Arts and Art as interchangeable, even as he points out that art had been elevated above the Fine Arts by the 1830s.<sup>20</sup> Art, he says, 'was no longer simply a generic term for any human making and performance, as under the old system of art [i.e. what I am calling the liberal and mechanical arts], nor even shorthand for the category of Fine Art [note: in the singular] constructed in the late eighteenth century [in my narrative the Fine Arts is first formulated in the seventeenth century and in the plural not the singular] but had become the name of an autonomous realm and a transcendent force'.<sup>21</sup>

If the terms Fine Arts and art (in general) become interchangeable or synonymous, I want to suggest, this is only after the establishment of art as a mode of production comes to subsume the Fine Arts. Fine Art in the singular is initially nothing more than a term for referring to one of the Fine Arts but after the formation of art as a real abstraction the term Fine Art appears as a synonym for art in general. Likewise, the conflation of the arts and art is only possible after the abstraction of art from the arts as the hegemonic term under which the arts continue to operate. It is, therefore, understandable that old terms continue to be used in new circumstances and accumulate in this way, but when

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19 Young in Batteux 2015, p. lxviii.

20 Shiner 2001, p. 189.

21 Shiner 2001, pp. 193–4.

they do, they conceal the historical transformations that leave a mark on them. My aim is not to overstate the differences but to use them as a guide in the reconstruction of the social history that they barely signify.

In that literature that recognises some kind of transformation of the category of art, the dating of the historical transition under question varies considerably. Kristeller identifies the break with Batteux's *The Beaux Arts* in 1746 because his analysis focused attention on the 'grouping of the visual arts with poetry and music into the system of the fine arts', a category, he notes, that 'did not exist in classical antiquity, in the Middle Ages or in the Renaissance'.<sup>22</sup> Luc Ferry charts the related 'birth of aesthetics'<sup>23</sup> in the middle of the eighteenth century as grounded in an earlier and broader development of the 'subjectivisation of the Beautiful'<sup>24</sup> or the 'subjectivisation of the world'<sup>25</sup> during the Enlightenment. Michael Carter fleshes out the context of this transition by saying 'societies that started to become dominated by industrialised methods of production, as Europe was in the 19th century, the making of Art starts to be organised and understood in different ways to that of general production'.<sup>26</sup> In particular, he says, art came to be 'seen as an activity with a high degree of individual control of the making process and with the increase in individual responsibility'.<sup>27</sup> Other temporalities have also been proposed.

Clearly, the lack of consensus on dating the transition from the arts to the Fine Arts or to art in general is connected to disagreements over what constitutes this passage. In some accounts, the narrative is a string of conceptual events, whereas in others it is a sociological or economic transition such as the shift from patronage to the market. Rancière identifies a stratified and complex historical process, saying:

Art as a notion designating a form of specific experience has only existed in the West since the end of the eighteenth century. All kinds of arts and practices existed before then, to be sure, among which a small number benefitted from a privileged status, due not to their intrinsic excellence but to their place in the division of social conditions. Fine Arts were the progeny of the so-called liberal arts. The latter were distinguished from the mechanical arts because they were the pastime of free men, men

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22 Kristeller 1990, p. 224.

23 Ferry 1993, p. 20.

24 Ferry 1993, p. 45.

25 Ferry 1993, p. 19.

26 Carter 1990, p. 51.

27 Carter 1990, p. 13.

of leisure whose very quality was meant to deter them from seeking too much perfection in material performances that an artisan or a slave could accomplish. Art as such began to exist in the West when this hierarchy began to vacillate.<sup>28</sup>

Rancière emphasises art as a 'notion' and focuses on processes of designation that differ from processes of classification only insofar as ideas and categories are not understood as the product of the individuals who formulate them but the social and historical 'partition of the sensible', which characterises the specific ordering of the world for a given society. In this way Rancière is able to pass fluently from issues within discourse to social systems and the revolutionary historical processes by which one system replaces another.

By separating the alleged 'intrinsic excellence' of the Fine Arts from 'their place in the division of social conditions', Rancière builds his account on either the assumption that artistic practices themselves did not change or a theoretical indifference to such changes given that the significant development under question is one of designation and placement. This position appears to be feasible because the specific labour processes of drawing, painting, carving and composing do not change significantly during this period, but this neglects real changes in the social relations of artistic production. However, a different narrative is required to capture the transformation of the social form of artistic labour.

Studies of the transformation of art in the long passage from feudalism to capitalism, when they pay attention to economic changes, tend to stress modifications in modes of circulation and consumption rather than the metamorphosis of artistic production itself. Typical of this tradition, Shiner says, 'the market played a key role'.<sup>29</sup> Talking of the transition from patronage to the art market is perhaps useful as shorthand (to designate the transformation of art's mode of production from handicraft workshop production within the guild and the court to individual studio production within the gallery system), but it gives the false impression of a systemic change brought about by changes within the organisation of art's circulation.

Western Marxist theories of commodification, reification, spectacle and real subsumption all subscribe to the principle that changes in circulation, either of artworks specifically or commodities generally, are decisive in the formation of the social character of art as distinct from the arts. When the inquiry focuses

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28 Rancière 2013, p. ix.

29 Shiner 2001, p. 89.

on circulation, classification and so on it is possible to ascertain discourses of the artist, the romance of the studio, the academicisation of the art school and so on as corresponding to the patterns and structures of capitalism. However, such correlations typically exaggerate either the complicity or autonomy of art in capitalism. Such accounts can be persuasive, complex, insightful, sophisticated and highly mediated, of course. What has been left obscure, however, is the relationship between them. When the difference between the artisan and the artist is discussed, for instance, the change is ascribed either to a false distinction (the myth of the artist-genius and the like) or to the effects of the commodification of artworks or to the individualism of bourgeois society more generally.

Notwithstanding theoretical problems with accounting for changes in the mode of production by tracing changes in circulation and consumption, the view that art emerges from the arts as a result of the transition from patronage to the art market blocks the analysis of changes in the social relations of the artist's studio and its supply chains, the division of labour between artists and their assistants, the division of labour between the artist, the art dealer and the art tutor, and so on and so forth. While it has certainly not gone unnoticed that painters and sculptors in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance worked collectively in artisan studios, art historians have tended to focus their attention on certain exemplary individuals and often exaggerated the degree to which they operated outside the artisan workshop system, abjured the use of assistants and apprentices, etc.

Typical of the tendency to overstate the modernity of the Renaissance, Geraldine Johnson claims it was with 'the influence of Vasari and the artist he most admired, Michelangelo, that many of our most fondly held assumptions about artists, art, and art history first emerged'.<sup>30</sup> There is, of course, ample anecdotal evidence to support the claim that the Renaissance constitutes the inaugural episode of art's separation from handicraft but what is decisive on this point is the social relations of production of the Renaissance workshop which remained artisanal, reproduced itself through the master-apprentice relationship, and continued to regulated within the dual system of guild and court.

Retrospectively, it appears as if an elite of practitioners in the Renaissance who won certain exemptions from the guild by squeezing privileges from the court anticipate what was to become the standard by which all artists were to be measured from the great artisan to the artist cannot take place without

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<sup>30</sup> Johnson 2005, p. 120.

an artistic division of labour that was not present during the Renaissance. If a minority of guild master artisans in the Renaissance and in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century academy system who obtained exemptions from guild regulations came to appear as paragons of artistic individualism and were cited as vivid precedents for the modern myth of the artist, this is no basis for neglecting the difference between the mode of production for the arts, the Fine Arts and art in general.

While the social form of artistic labour in the Renaissance remains artisanal, the aspiration for painters and sculptors to attain the scholarly status of the liberal arts is expedited through what we might call *techniques of elevation* including the biography of eminent painters and sculptors, the founding of the first academy, the grouping of painting, sculpture and architecture into the arts of design, and the opening skirmishes against artisan painters and sculptors. The desire for painting, sculpture and architecture to be accorded the status of the liberal arts, or at least to rise above the level of the mechanical arts, was not a demand to break with the feudal mode of production but expressed its highest wish. The Fine Arts is a category formed within the rivalry between court and guild and according to the norms of feudal society.

Among the techniques of elevation deployed by painters and sculptors in the Renaissance is the demarcation between the liberal and mechanical within the workshop. Originally, the workshop was not merely a place of work but also a shop that had an opening onto the street and a space behind for producing 'works of art'. The workshop would also typically be attached to living quarters for the apprentices and artisan day-labourers as well as the home of the 'master'. Some Renaissance workshops also contained a small private room for the master called a 'scrittoio' or a 'studiolo' and therefore a partition emerged within the workshop establishing two distinct spaces, the *bottega* and the *studiolo*. The *bottega* was a workroom occupied by apprentices and artisan day-labourers, whereas the *studiolo* was a separate space in the same building – perhaps nothing more than a desk, or a small space separated by a curtain – occupied by the master. As such, the desired elevation of the arts of painting, sculpture and architecture above the mechanical arts takes place within the artisanal workshop itself in the form of a partition within it.

The *studiolo* had some of the qualities of a study and is depicted in the history of art as a small room resembling 'the miser's counting room'<sup>31</sup> and the gentleman-scholar's study. Michael Cole and Mary Pardo say, 'the labors of the workshop ... were very different from the liberal exercises undertaken in the

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31 Wood 2005, p. 94.

*studiolo*.<sup>32</sup> More cautiously, we might say, the *studiolo* does not complete the elevation of painting and sculpture from the mechanical arts to the liberal arts but insofar as it *represents* scholarship, management and commerce, the demarcation of the *studiolo* from the *bottega* provided a space for the ‘master’ artisan to mark himself off from the manual labour of apprentices and journeymen. Hence, the spatial division between the *studiolo* and the *bottega* replicated in miniature the division between mechanical work and liberal contemplation that was integral to the hierarchy of the arts in the classical, medieval and Renaissance social order.

Technique was allocated a spatial characteristic that was socially coded. Martin Wackernagel’s account of the various technical stages of making paintings and sculptures in the fifteenth century is a useful entry point for outlining a hierarchy of techniques in the Renaissance. The stages of making a painting, from the preparation of the panel, the drawing of the design, the cartoon, grinding colours, manufacturing brushes, preparing grounds and underpainting, transferring the cartoon to the panel, painting the modelled shadow areas, adding colour to each area of the tonal painting, background and clothes, painting hands and faces, to the finishing touches, can be rearranged according to who was assigned to perform certain tasks. The preparation of panels and the carving of frames were activities executed by carpenters outside the workshop. Grinding colours and making brushes were jobs for apprentices. Accomplished apprentices and adept assistants were trusted to execute a work planned and sketched by the master. Likewise, transcribing a drawing to full size or adding colour to an outlined painting, were skilled activities that could be assigned to apprentices and assistants. Designing the work and composing its elements was reserved exclusively for the master, as was the application of the finishing touches or retouches. In some cases, the master would do little more than signing off the work of others, but the decision could only be taken by him.

In the case of sculpture, sourcing the stone or marble, carving out the block and transporting it could be done by a group of artisans or assistants. Also, carving out the basic shape of a sculpture could be completed by apprentices or assistants. The preliminary drawing and the initial model for the sculpture in wax or clay would be made by the master. The full-size clay model would be made by assistants and apprentices with the master supervising and making final adjustments. Most of the ‘laborious chiselwork’<sup>33</sup> would be assigned by

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32 Cole and Pardo 2005, p. 19.

33 Wackernagel 1981 [1938], p. 314.

the master to members of his workshop. The social character of the division of labour and the hierarchy of practices within sculpture in the Renaissance is indicated negatively by Michelangelo's practice of deviating from his own drawings to such an extent that no assistant could take his place and his insistence on working the block from scratch, as well as his preference for visiting the quarry himself to select and cut out the block for a sculpture. All of this meant that Michelangelo could not delegate the mechanical aspects of the production of works of art because, in his improvisatory practice, nothing was entirely mechanical.

The absence of the demarcation between *bottega* and *studiolo* in Michelangelo's practice could be interpreted as risking the deadly association with the mechanical, but it was understood at the time as the most complete triumph of the liberal in the arts of design. Michelangelo was regarded as 'divine' because his technique exceeded his own plans. This was true, technically, insofar as Michelangelo would continue to invent, improvise and adjust his work at every stage, but it was also a legible statement to his peers. It was, in short, a technique of elevation. Michelangelo's unrelenting inventiveness was secured by and, in turn, necessitated, the exclusion of assistants from almost the entire process of artistic production because it replaced every mechanical operation with improvisatory techniques that constituted him as a special character: indispensable, unique, unsubstitutable.

Perhaps we can simply acknowledge that the basis of the recognition of Michelangelo as a supreme talent turned on his specific reconfiguration of the border between the master and the assistant which he pushed almost to infinity. The master, for Michelangelo, must do everything or almost everything; the assistant cannot act as the proxy of the master even in processes that for other sculptors and painters appear to be purely mechanical operations. His dismissal of assistants in the painting of the Sistine Chapel ceiling, for instance, which has become a prominent episode in the myth of the artist, testifies to his transposition of the border between master and assistant but the fact that a small number of assistants remained to grind colour and so on, also testifies to the impossibility during the Renaissance to completely eradicate the need for assistants. As such, Michelangelo represents an extreme position within the division of labour between master and assistant rather than representing the supersession of that relationship altogether.

For both painting and sculpture, drawing caps the hierarchy of practices. Drawing therefore came to carry the burden of their claim to be liberal. However, it was only insofar as drawing was identified with the technical manifestation of *design* and *invention* that it appeared to exemplify the liberal arts. Even as the process of observation in which the draughtsman came closest to the

natural philosopher, drawing was not sufficient to distinguish the proponent of the arts of design from the mechanic. Only a certain kind of drawing was meant to epitomise what Martin Kemp refers to as the three levels of ability necessary for painting and sculpture to be regarded as liberal in the Renaissance, namely 'innate brilliance of mind, acquired learning and executant skill'.<sup>34</sup> Chiefly, the elevation of painting, sculpture and architecture depended on the campaign to reconsider drawing as representing the Renaissance virtues of practice that Kemp described as activating 'connotations of learning and knowledge rather than ... associations with codes of routine to be followed with unquestioning diligence'.<sup>35</sup>

Drawing as a method of learning, which was essential for apprentices, is the highest form of education in painting and sculpture but is not, in itself, the most esteemed form of practice. Wackernagel identifies three stages<sup>36</sup> in the drawing process for a painting in the Quattrocento, which represent a hierarchy of practices. First, the master sketches a picture in the form of a composition, then would follow 'nature studies' and the like to clarify the features of the composition, and finally, a 'precisely detailed sketch of the whole composition' would be completed. It is from this final drawing, often made the full size of the painting, that the artwork would be executed. Drawing could occupy any place within the hierarchy of practices from the most divine to the most menial. Drawing was liberal only insofar as it was recognised as an act of planning, thought and composition in which the individual's character was at stake. Execution is mechanical precisely because it could always be passed on to someone else. Such practices as working from a 'cartoon' could only edge towards the liberal arts by being executed in such a way as to add significantly to or deviate from what has been planned. Also, the technical development of drawing through the acquisition of the skills required to construct perspectival space was not the kind of drawing practice that garnered value within the hierarchy of techniques. As Kemp puts it, the 'humanists do not appear to have set much store by the painters' new science'.<sup>37</sup>

Typically, the *studiolo* marked off conception, design and management from the more manual and laborious phases of work, but the division between the *bottega* and *studiolo* occupied an indeterminate and unstable place between the mechanical and liberal arts because the *studiolo* makes a claim that cannot be accomplished or verified internally through the morphology of the activ-

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34 Kemp 1977, p. 390.

35 Kemp 1977, p. 389.

36 Wackernagel 1981 [1938], p. 319.

37 Kemp 1977, p. 392.



ies that it houses. This spatial interval not only belonged to the hierarchy of the arts at large in which the liberal arts were connected to the mechanical arts through a system that also separated them, it also marked an interruption within a hierarchy of techniques within painting and sculpture. That is to say, the rise of scholarly texts on art by Alberti, Vasari and Da Vinci, and the founding of the first academies of design, do not *confirm* the success of the *studiolo* to break away from the *bottega* and establish painting and sculpture among the liberal arts; they are supplementary means for elevating painting and sculpture above the mechanical arts with which they had always been associated.

The *studiolo*, insofar as it transplanted the scholar's study into the artisan's workshop, was a kind of architectural manifesto for painting and sculpture as liberal arts. Renaissance academies had the same effect. Characteristically scholarly gatherings, academies discussed topics related to the liberal arts from which painting and sculpture had been excluded as mechanical arts. These events were the historical precedent for the lecture series of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century academies of painting and sculpture and thereby stand as the origin of the abiding emphasis on theory in modern and contemporary art. The *studiolo* and the early academies were an attempt to stamp the arts of design as scholarly activities.

The *studiolo* and the reclassification of drawing elevated painting, sculpture and architecture by dividing the individual designer-draughtsman off from the mechanical arts. This was achieved by associating that part of the division of labour monopolised by the master with scholarship and the humanities, especially poetry. Hagiographies of eminent masters, therefore, underlined, exposed and exaggerated an already existing hierarchy within the social relations of the workshop in order to counter and reformulate a hierarchy that existed outside it. This demarcation built on the privileges of the dual system of guild and court the established hierarchy of master, journeyman and apprentice, within rather against this specific system. Hence, if there were normative pressures on individuals such as Raphael to distance himself from the manual labour of the *bottega* through drawing designs that were completed by his underlings, there were also material and economic counter-pressures that prevented the *studiolo* from being absolutely independent from the *bottega*.

Economically, the spatial division within the artisan workshop marked and masked relations of dependence and exploitation: the *studiolo* depended on the production of the *bottega* even though the apprentices and journeymen working in the *bottega* appeared to depend for their livelihood on the master in the *studiolo*. As such, the independence of the *studiolo* from the *bottega* is relative not absolute. It is an interval in space not an exodus from the workshop because it corresponds to the stretching of a real and symbolic social hierarchy

rather than a break between the artist and the artisan. That is to say, the division within the artisan workshop between the *studiolo* and the *bottega* does not do away with the artisanal mode of production.

There is a division of labour between what takes place in the *bottega* and what takes place in the *studiolo*, and this division marks a social distinction between the apprentices and day-labourers on the one hand and the master on the other, but there is no spatial dispersal of production (such as, later, between the art production in the studio and the manufacture of paints in factories), nor the intervention of market transactions between the various separate phases of production (such as, later, between artists and the fabricators who produce their works). If the relationship between the master artisan and the apprentices and journeymen now appears more remote than before, the workshop remains the economic unit of production.

Artists in the twentieth century as well as today also often worked collectively in ways that were suppressed by the myth of the individual author and therefore there is a remarkable sense of continuity between the attitude to assistants and apprentices expressed in the Renaissance and the systemic denial of assistants in the representation of artistic labour in modern and contemporary art. Henry Moore, for instance, employed a group of assistants to execute his work with various levels of control over the character of the final work, but they were very rarely depicted within images and films of the artist in the studio. The image of the painter or sculptor alone in the studio producing their own work without a social division of labour and without a boss or a buyer has come to represent not only the epitome of artistic production but also the paradigm of free labour, if not freedom full stop.

What this image of the unassisted producer signifies, however, differs in the arts, the Fine Arts and art in general. Each social form of artistic labour has its own distinctive normative economy through which the individualised producer is interpellated and enforced above and to the side of actual practices. For the arts, the separation is relative and conceals the distinctive social division of labour of the artisan workshop; for the Fine Arts it is an absolute break with handicraft that is based on the establishment of a two-tier system for the production of works of art; and for art in general it is internalised as a project of eliminating the remnants of handicraft from artistic production itself.

The artist's studio is not the final separation of the *studiolo* from the *bottega* but an historically unprecedented hybrid of them insofar as the artist has a studio to *make* works of art. The studio is the *bottega* under the domination of the *studiolo*. The relationship between the workshop and studio, which is not identical with the relationship between the *bottega* and the *studiolo*, and particularly the distinction between them, is obscured by the stubborn preference

of painters and sculptors since the Renaissance to stage their self-portraits in private rooms that resemble studios deliberately suppressing the representation of handicraft activities in various types of workshop.

Rembrandt, for instance, whose large three-storey house contained several distinct workshops, when he depicted himself at work, so to speak, did so in an image of himself alone with his easel and paints. This was a deliberate tactic, 'to promote himself and distinguish himself from his contemporaries or rivals'.<sup>38</sup> Even before the studio became the standard terrain of artistic labour, something very much like it already 'symbolised the act of creation, a space that embodies the arduous and fulfilling process of devising a world of illusion or significance',<sup>39</sup> as Giles Waterfield puts it. As such, although the studio, as a specific historical form of spatial organisation, cannot be considered merely 'as the normative concept applied to places of artistic production',<sup>40</sup> there are certainly normative, symbolic and semiotic features that contribute to the constitution of the studio and continue to activate it socially.

Private and individual in certain respects, the artist's studio belongs to and is one of the sources of a social imaginary of the artist and artistic production. In her book *Machine in the Studio* Caroline Jones narrates the passage from the Abstract Expressionist 'romance of the studio'<sup>41</sup> to the abandonment of the studio in site-specificity and Land Art via the anti-romantic embrace of semi-industrial techniques and the social production of art in Minimalism and Pop Art to construct a critique of the artist as a heroic individual. Warhol renamed his studio 'The Factory', that is to say, renaming the space (a Duchampian gesture of nomination, perhaps), as a site for the production of market goods and the place in which labour is social rather than individual.

Waterfield points out that until the nineteenth century British artists preferred the term 'Painting Room' to studio, and in France the word refers to a one room apartment.<sup>42</sup> And Daniel Buren, one of the pioneers of the critique of the studio as 'the first frame, the first limit, upon which all subsequent frames/limits will depend'<sup>43</sup> in the 1960s and 1970s, identified two types of artist's studio, the 'European Type' and the 'American Type'. The former, he claims, are modelled on high-ceilinged Parisian rooms and the latter are characteristically reclaimed lofts, barns and warehouses. 'The art of yesterday and today is not

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38 Chapman 2005, p. 110.

39 Waterfield 2009, p. 3.

40 Adamson 2007, p. 14.

41 Jones 1996, pp. 1–59.

42 Waterfield 2009, p. 1.

43 Buren 1979 [1971], p. 51.

only marked by the studio as an essential, often unique, place of production; it proceeds from it', Buren wrote, adding: 'All my work proceeds from its extinction'.<sup>44</sup>

Jones represents not only the feminist critique of the modernist institutions and discourses of art but also a North American structural critique of humanism that discloses multiple forms of power located within the artist as a social actant. Feminist art history transformed not only how the representation of women was interpreted but also provided critical reinterpretations of the artist and its myths including how artistic labour is figured in art's discourses. Linda Nochlin's 1971 essay 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' is a major contribution to the critique of the Enlightenment, Romantic and modernist conceptions of the artist as a peculiarly masculine variant of freedom in labour that has subsequently been developed by the Guerrilla Girls, among others.

For the arts, the isolation of the painter and sculptor from assistants marks the elevation of painting and sculpture above the mechanical arts through the subordination of mechanical processes necessary for the production of works of art under the alleged liberal arts such as drawing undertaken in the *studiolo*. For the Fine Arts, however, the separation from handicraft is declared principally through an opposition between two types of painter or sculptor, exemplified by the division between the guild the academy that represent them. The differentiation is no longer internal to the technical processes required to produce works of art but distinguishes between a superior and inferior class of production and two distinct economies. In the case of art in general, though, a different type of discrepancy emerges in which the artist is differentiated from the artisan and the worker, as I will demonstrate later, through the double process of ejecting mechanical processes out of the studio and eliminating handicraft processes within it. In particular, the material basis for the isolation of the artist as an individual producer of art – and therefore the normative separation of the artist from the artisan and the worker – is the mechanisation and commodification of the artisanal processes that were previously necessary for the production of works of art.

The arts of design, as the name implies, remain arts and continue to operate within the hierarchy of the arts and according to the mode of production of the arts. Even if some individuals raised themselves by eliminating assistants and apprentices as far as possible, these arts continued to be passed on through the generations through an apprentice system regulated by the guild. While the apprenticeship came under question as an appropriate mode of acquisition for

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44 Buren 1979 [1971], p. 58.

painting and sculpture as liberal arts, the alternative of the academies initially did not teach and functioned more like a seminar and social event for scholarly masters.

The Renaissance episode is not the historical origin of the modern condition of the heroic artist even if a gap begins to open up between a minority of master artisans and their own assistants and their artisanal peers, and a hagiographical literature exaggerates their independence and divinity in contrast with handicraft generally. The story of the differentiation of art in general from the manifold specific arts begins with the Renaissance demarcation of the *studiolo* and the *bottega* and with the hierarchy of practices that emphasised the difference between design (drawing) and handicraft, but painting and sculpture remain arts and continue to conform to the artisanal division of labour. Not only do the great masters of the Renaissance continue to occupy a place within the artisan workshop, they do not represent art in general but merely the attempt to elevate certain arts within the order of the mechanical and liberal arts. Subsequent historical events give the Renaissance painters and sculptors their appearance of modernity. We must turn, therefore, to the intensification of the battle between the guild and court in the seventeenth century through the development of the academies of painting and sculpture which consolidated the category of the Fine Arts.

Kristeller is right to identify the grouping of arts in Batteux's *The Beaux Arts* in 1746 as a landmark in the history of the antagonism between guild and academy or, as it comes to be understood, between art and handicraft, but events had preceded this theoretical construction in 1648, with the founding of the *Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture* in Paris. Initially a fragile, small and vulnerable institution, in the century leading up to Batteux's formulation of the 'single principle' that distinguishes the 'Beaux Arts', the Académie had re-established itself as a prestigious institution that could secure privileges for its members and a prestigious reputation for bringing 'together the best French artists in a single body'.<sup>45</sup> It is to this episode in the history of the transformation of art's social form of labour that I will now turn.

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45 Michel 2018, p. xiii.