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How has the rise of social media platforms influenced the valuation of artistic work in contemporary society?

Social media has become a major part of how we create and experience art, with platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Pinterest changing the way people think about and value artistic work (Artland Magazine, 2023). In the past, artists had to rely on galleries, museums, and exhibitions to showcase their work to the public, meaning that only a small number of artists had the opportunity to display their art while people had to visit physical locations to see it. However, social media has completely transformed this process by allowing artists to share their creations directly with a large audience from all over the world. This shift has made it easier for more people to access and appreciate different forms of art, while also changing the way we measure success in the art world, as online engagement through likes, comments, and shares now plays a key role in how art is valued (Yang, 2024).

This dissertation will explore how social media affects the value of art by looking at how social media platforms influence the way people view and appreciate art. When a post with an artwork receives many likes, shares, and positive comments, people may see it as more valuable or important, while art that does not get much engagement may be seen as less significant even if it is of high quality (Kapoor et al., 2022). This change in how value is assigned has created new opportunities and challenges for artists. The dissertation will also examine how the shift from analogue to digital photography has affected the art world, as digital photography allows people to take, edit, and share photos instantly, making photography more accessible to everyone (Lee and Lee, 2019). This shift has led to an increase in the number of people who see themselves as photographers or visual artists, which has broadened access to the art form but also raised questions about the originality and authenticity of digital art (Gerlis, 2014).

Another key topic this dissertation will address is how social media's focus on perfection impacts mental health and self-perception. Many artists and social media users feel pressure to present only their "best" work or the "perfect" version of their life, which creates constant pressure to meet high aesthetic standards. This can affect mental well-being, as people compare themselves to others online, and artists may feel the need to create work that fits popular trends on social media rather than following their own creative instincts (Berlin Art Grid, 2023). A relevant example of this is the photographer @peter.mckinnon on Instagram, who often showcases polished, high-quality imagery that embodies these aesthetic ideals, influencing both creators and viewers. Additionally, viewers of social

media art may develop unrealistic expectations for their own creative abilities or personal lives, as the constant exposure to heavily edited images can distort people's views of reality and lead to feelings of inadequacy or self-doubt (Lepp Institute of Art, 2023).

The main questions this dissertation aims to answer include: How does social media affect the way people value art? How do likes, shares, and comments shape people's opinions about art? Has the shift from analogue to digital photography made it easier for people to access photography as an art form? How does editing and sharing photos online impact how people see themselves and their mental well-being? By exploring these questions, the dissertation will provide a deeper understanding of how social media platforms have transformed the art world. It will highlight how the shift from traditional gallery spaces to digital platforms has made art more accessible to the public, while also revealing how the role of "success" in the art world has changed as online engagement now plays a major role in defining value. Finally, it will explore the mental health effects of constantly consuming and creating "perfect" images online, offering a clear view of how social media has reshaped the way we think about and value art in today's society (Ginsburgh and Throsby, 2014).

Section 1 - The Role of Social Media in Valuing Art

Social media has created a cycle where audience reactions, such as likes, comments, and shares, play a big role in deciding an artwork's value. In the past, experts such as critics and art historians would determine an art piece's worth. Now, social media has changed

this by giving ordinary users a way to influence an artist's success through simple interactions (Kapoor et al., 2022; Artland Magazine, 2023).

This change has led to more "Instagram-friendly" art. Artists create pieces that are colourful, striking, and emotionally engaging, knowing they'll attract attention. The more likes a post receives, the more often social media algorithms will show it to other users, increasing its exposure. Art that's easy to share, like in "story's" or reposts, becomes more visible, which also increases its perceived value. The kinds of comments people leave—whether it's praise, critique, or humor—add to the overall conversation around the artist's work (Jurgenson, 2019).

Value is no longer just about money. It now includes "social capital," which is the attention and reputation an artist builds online. Artists who gain large followings can use their popularity to get brand deals, collaborations, and sponsorships. This change means that online interactions and popularity now have more influence on an artwork's value than traditional ideas like craftsmanship or deep meaning (Yang, 2024).



In December 2024, Khloé Kardashian introduced her first solo fragrance, XO Khloé, at Harrods in London. For the event, she wore a shimmering gold dress that highlighted her glamorous style. The dress was form-fitting and adorned with sequins and gems, reflecting light as she posed. She completed her look with matching strappy heels.



The image features several men huddled around a fire in a snowy landscape. The scene is rich in contrast: warm firelight versus the cold, bluish snow; movement versus stillness. McKinnon uses shallow depth of field and cinematic colour grading — hallmarks of his signature style.

Social media platforms use algorithms that promote viral content. This has led to a style of art that is designed to quickly grab attention. Art with bright colours, surreal images, or "perfect" aesthetics stands out as people scroll through their feeds. Because of this, artists feel pressure to create "scroll-stopping" images, often following trends rather than focusing on traditional artistic styles (Jurgenson, 2019; Berlin Art Grid, 2023). Popular artists like @peter.mckinnon,

@brandonwoelfel, and @tezza have mastered this approach. Peter McKinnon's cinematic photos tell stories with sharp, clean visuals. Brandon Woelfel's photos use soft lighting, glowing objects, and dreamy effects to create a magical feel. Tezza's polished lifestyle shots fit the clean, stylish "Instagram look" that works well on the platform. These artists' success shows that visibility and popularity on social media don't always come from technical skill or deep meaning. Instead, the most popular art is often the most shareable, visually pleasing, or emotionally striking (Kapoor et al., 2022). While their work requires talent, it's clear that social media success depends on more than just traditional art values.

My practise takes a different approach by encouraging participants to explore emotional themes like "comfort," "joy," and "nostalgia" using Polaroid photography. This project offers a new way to think about what makes art valuable. While social media art focuses on perfection and broad appeal, this project values personal, honest, and meaningful interpretations. Unlike social media, which highlights perfect images, Polaroid photography

requires patience and thoughtful choices (Jurgenson, 2019).



The subject, lit with soft neon tones, wears a denim race jacket and looks directly at the camera.

The background is blurred with bokeh lights — a hallmark of Woelfel's dreamy, cinematic style.

In this project, the value of art isn't decided by likes, comments, or shares. Instead, it's based on the emotional connection the participant has with their work. For instance, a participant might capture "comfort" as a cosy chair lit by soft sunlight, representing a personal moment of peace. The image's value comes from its personal meaning, not from

how many people like or share it. By encouraging participants to reflect on themes like "calm" or "fear," the project shifts the focus from visual perfection to emotional depth (Lepp Institute of Art, 2023).

This project challenges social media's idea of value by showing that art's worth is personal and subjective. Polaroid photography's unique features, like limited shots and unpredictable results, push participants to be more thoughtful. Unlike social media's fast-paced "scroll and like" culture, this project asks participants to slow down and connect more deeply with their images. Instead of looking for likes or outside validation, participants find meaning within themselves. This approach highlights how art's value comes from emotional experience rather than online popularity (Jurgenson, 2019).

The project's collaborative element also reflects the idea that art's value comes from different perspectives. By having multiple participants interpret the same theme, it shows that value isn't about everyone doing the same thing. Instead, it's about the richness of different experiences. This approach pushes back against the idea that likes and shares should define artistic success. Social media has changed how people view and value art. The number of likes, comments, and shares now measures success, and algorithms promote art that's visually striking and easy to share (Berlin Art Grid, 2023; Kapoor et al., 2022). Artists like @brandonwoelfel have used this system to create art that performs well on social media. However, their success shows that popularity and visibility don't always connect with traditional ideas of art's value, like skill or deep meaning.

My project takes a different approach by focusing on personal connection and emotional depth. Using Polaroid photography and prompts the project asks participants to slow down and think deeply about their images. This contrasts with social media's focus on speed and mass appeal. By promoting reflection and collaboration, the project offers a new way to think about art's value—showing that real value comes from emotional connection and personal experience, not just online popularity (Lepp Institute of Art, 2023).

Section 2 - The Shift from Analog to Digital Photography

The shift from analog to digital photography has completely changed the world of art, making it far more accessible to people of all skill levels. Unlike traditional film photography, which required special equipment, knowledge of film development, and a significant amount of time and patience, digital photography offers instant results, easy editing, and seamless sharing. This shift has opened up creative opportunities for both amateurs and professional artists, allowing anyone with access to a smartphone or camera to create, edit, and share their work with a global audience (Lee and Lee, 2019; Manovich, 2017).

One of the biggest reasons for the increased accessibility of photography is the development of high-quality smartphone cameras. In the past, taking high-quality photographs required access to expensive cameras, film rolls, and photo development tools. Today, smartphones like iPhones and Android devices come equipped with advanced camera technology, including multiple lenses and AI enhancements. This allows

users to capture clear, vibrant, and professional-looking images with minimal effort (Manovich, 2017).

In addition to camera advancements, editing apps like Adobe Lightroom, Snapseed, and VSCO have made photo editing accessible to everyone. Previously, photo editing was a skill reserved for those with access to expensive desktop software like Photoshop, as well as the technical knowledge to use it. Now, mobile apps offer simple steps to where users can adjust brightness, contrast, saturation, and filters with just a few taps. This has enabled people to create polished, professional-looking images regardless of their level of experience (Rettberg, 2014).

Cloud storage and photo-sharing platforms like Google Photos, iCloud, and social media apps have also contributed to this shift. Digital photography allows users to store thousands of images in "the cloud" without worrying about physical storage limits. This easy access to an archive of photos encourages people to experiment with their photography skills and share their work with the world (Peraica, 2017).

Digital photography's accessibility has fuelled the rise of "social media photographers" — creators who have built careers through platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Unlike traditional photographers, who might rely on gallery exhibits or print media, these creators showcase their work online, often blending photography with lifestyle, fashion, and branding. Photographers like @jessicakobeissi have used social media to develop unique styles and personal brands. Jessica Kobeissi's use of colour grading, lighting, and posing techniques have made her images instantly recognisable. Her success reflects how

social media allows photographers to cultivate a dedicated following, monetise their work, and establish themselves as influential creators in the field (Kapoor et al., 2022).

Social media photographers often share behind-the-scenes content, tutorials, and tips, which not only builds engagement but also inspires and educates others. This approach has made photography more accessible because aspiring photographers can learn directly from experienced creators. As a result, many people who previously felt intimidated by the technical side of photography now have the confidence to pursue it as a hobby or career (Rettberg, 2014).

This shift has also redefined what it means to be a "professional photographer." In the past, professionals were associated with expensive equipment, formal training, and industry connections. Today, a "professional" photographer can be someone with a smartphone, a signature editing style, and a large following on social media. This has created a more inclusive and diverse photography community where new voices and styles are constantly emerging (Manovich, 2017).

While digital photography's accessibility is a major benefit, it also comes with new challenges. As more people create content, the issue of originality and authenticity becomes more complex. With editing apps and filters so readily available, many photos begin to look alike. The rise of "Instagram aesthetics" has led to a sense of sameness in visual content. For example, platforms like TikTok and Instagram reward trends and popular styles through algorithmic promotion. As a result, many creators feel pressure to mimic viral aesthetics to boost their visibility. This "trend-chasing" approach often means

that creative originality takes a back seat to what's popular or "in style" (Jurgenson, 2019; Zappavigna, 2012).

Although, editing tools blur the line between reality and fiction. Apps like Facetune allow users to alter physical features, while colour-grading apps transform ordinary environments into vibrant dreams. This has sparked debates around authenticity, especially in portrait photography, where edited images sometimes present unrealistic standards of beauty (Peraica, 2017). Another challenge for originality is the overwhelming volume of content. With millions of photos uploaded daily, standing out becomes increasingly difficult. Photographers now have to push for unique concepts, styles, or narratives to make their work noticeable. While originality has always been a hallmark of good art, the sheer scale of digital content means that "originality" is harder to achieve than ever before (Thomson, 2020).

Section 3 - The Impact of Social Media on Mental Health and Self-Perception

Perfectionism has become a key part of social media culture, especially in the art world where platforms like Instagram display carefully organised feeds of flawless creative work. While these platforms give artists a chance to share their work with a worldwide audience, they also create pressure to show "perfect" art. This constant need for perfection can have serious effects on artists' mental health, impacting their self-esteem and creative freedom (Lepp Institute of Art, 2023; Jurgenson, 2019).

One major way that social media's focus on perfection impacts mental health is through constant comparison. As artists scroll through their feeds, they see visually appealing content that seems effortless. However, much of the art seen on social media goes through extensive editing and curation. This can lead artists to feel like they must match this level of perfection in their own work, often feeling like their creations are "not good enough." Over time, this pattern of comparison can lower self-worth and cause artists to connect their personal value to the success of their art online (Berlin Art Grid, 2023).

The pursuit of perfection is often linked to social validation, where likes, comments, and shares act as a measure of success. Artists may start creating art that fits popular trends instead of following their own creative instincts. This shift from internal motivation to external approval can hurt mental health, as artists lose touch with their personal creative voice. Rather than making art that reflects their own journey, they may feel forced to match the styles that perform well on social media. This cycle can make artists feel stuck, constantly creating "what works" instead of "what matters" (Jurgenson, 2019; Rettberg, 2014).

For example, artist and woodworker @aleksandraxee is known for her detailed woodwork that highlights balance, symmetry, and precision. Her work is often seen as "perfect" due to its clean lines, smooth finishes, and balanced designs. While her pieces are undeniably beautiful, they also show the intense pressure artists face to meet high visual standards. Because her brand relies on precision, there's an expectation that each new piece will match or surpass the quality of her previous work. This can put internal pressure on artists

like Aleksandra Zee to maintain a consistent level of "perfection" in order to protect their brand's reputation and audience support (Peraica, 2017).

Similarly, photographer @karen.rosalie is known for her still-life compositions that are perfectly lit, colour-coordinated, and carefully arranged. Her work shows how social media's visual standards affect the creative process of artists. The lighting, angles, and object placement are all meticulously controlled to create a polished, "perfect" look. While this level of care is impressive, it also raises questions about the mental impact on artists who must maintain such high standards. For creators like Karen Rosalie, perfection becomes part of their artistic identity. Any change from this standard, even if it's artistically valid, may feel like a risk to their brand. This constant need to "stay perfect" can lead to anxiety or burnout, as artists feel they must always meet the expectations of their audience (Jurgenson, 2019; Lepp Institute of Art, 2023).

The pressure to conform to social media's perfection-driven culture also limits creative exploration. Artists may avoid taking creative risks or experimenting with new ideas for fear of not meeting the aesthetic expectations of their followers. This fear of risk-taking hinders artistic growth, which is essential for personal development. When artists feel trapped by perfectionism, their mental health may suffer as they experience frustration, boredom, and a sense of "going through the motions" instead of being actively engaged in their craft (Berlin Art Grid, 2023; Rettberg, 2014).

The drive for perfection promoted by social media also impacts mental health through anxiety and burnout. The constant pressure to "keep up" with content demands, deadlines,

and high expectations for flawless work creates a cycle of stress for artists. Unlike traditional art production, where creators can work at their own pace, social media operates on fast-paced visibility cycles. Algorithms prioritise frequent posting, so creators feel they must constantly produce "perfect" content to stay relevant. This never-ending pace leaves little room for rest, reflection, or creative recovery, leading to emotional exhaustion and burnout (Peraica, 2017; Jurgenson, 2019).

To fight the mental health effects of perfectionism, some artists such as @film.fawn are actively challenging the idea of perfection. For example, photographers and artists who work with Polaroid or instant film embrace the natural flaws of analog photography as part of their art. Unlike digital photography, Polaroid images can't be edited or retouched to "perfection." The unpredictable nature of film—light leaks, colour shifts, and unexpected compositions—becomes part of the final image. This shift toward imperfection allows artists to feel creative freedom, encouraging them to see flaws as part of the work's authenticity and honesty (Rettberg, 2014; Manovich, 2017).

Section 4 - The Role of Influencers and Digital Curators in Shaping Artistic Values

Social media has significantly changed the way art is valued and consumed. One key aspect of this shift is the role of influencers and digital curators in shaping public taste and influencing the perceived value of an artist's work. Traditionally, gallery owners and critic curators played a crucial role in determining which artists and artworks were worthy of attention. However, with the rise of social media platforms, the power to shape artistic trends and valuation has shifted to social media influencers, art bloggers, and digital

content curators. These figures hold the ability to spotlight emerging artists, introduce niche art forms to mainstream audiences (Ginsburgh and Throsby, 2014; Rettberg, 2014).

Influencers and digital curators have become modern-day "gatekeepers" of artistic value. By showcasing certain styles and techniques on their platforms, they create a ripple effect that drives public interest and demand. Unlike traditional art curators who operate within galleries and museums, social media influencers have the power to engage with global audiences in real-time. They introduce new artists and art forms to millions of followers, often leading to a surge in popularity for those artists. Platforms like Instagram offer a visually-driven space where influencers can curate aesthetically pleasing feeds centred around specific themes such as minimalism, street art, or contemporary portraiture (Zappavigna, 2012).

Accounts like @contemporaryart.daily serve as digital curators, consistently featuring artists' work, which increases visibility and often results in higher commercial value for those artists. Art influencer accounts with large followings have the potential to boost the status of lesser-known artists by featuring their work. For example, an unknown painter's career could change overnight if a major influencer like Alain Servais, who is an art collector, reposts their work to his thousands of followers (Kapoor et al., 2022).

Artistic taste is also shaped through collaborations. Many artists partner with influencers or are "tagged" in social media posts, allowing them to tap into larger audiences. This "network effect" increases the reach of the artist's work and raises its perceived value. When popular influencers showcase an artist's work, it signals to their followers that the artist's work is valuable, desirable, and worthy of attention. This process can result in more

commissions, gallery invitations, and even increased market prices for the artist's work (Gerlis, 2014).

Being featured or tagged by a major influencer is often seen as a breakthrough moment for artists. This "digital endorsement" serves as a form of validation that can boost an artist's visibility and increase the demand for their work. In some cases, being featured by an art influencer can be more impactful than being included in a physical gallery show, particularly when that influencer's following is large and engaged (Jurgenson, 2019).

For instance, @girlgaze, a platform dedicated to promoting female-identifying photographers, highlights talent and gives artists exposure to high-profile collaborations with brands like Nike and Levi's. For many of these artists, being featured by Girlgaze is a defining moment in their careers. Another notable example is the social media presence of art blogs like The Jealous Curator and Contemporary Art Daily. These platforms actively promote new and emerging artists by featuring their work online. For artists, being featured on one of these blogs can serve as a stepping stone to more prominent career opportunities, as it establishes their relevance in the contemporary art scene (Kapoor et al., 2022). The tagging system on platforms like Instagram also plays a key role in shaping artistic value. When an influencer tags an artist in their post, the artist's profile becomes easily accessible to the influencer's followers. This process often results in new followers, increased engagement, and higher demand for the artist's work. These tags act as digital referrals, driving potential collectors and buyers directly to the artist's page. As a result, being tagged by a prominent

influencer is often seen as a marker of status and credibility (Zappavigna, 2012; Jurgenson, 2019).

The traditional role of the gallery curator as the "gatekeeper" of artistic value has been challenged by the rise of social media influencers and digital curators. In the past, curators were responsible for selecting which artists' work would be displayed in exhibitions and museums. These curators wielded significant power, as their choices influenced not only the visibility of artists but also the commercial value of their work. Today, however, the power to shape the value of art has been decentralised. Social media has changed the process of art discovery. Instead of relying on a handful of big curators, artists can now gain visibility through influencers and self-promotion (Ginsburgh and Throsby, 2014; Rettberg, 2014). Platforms like TikTok's algorithm expose users to new artists without requiring an artist to "prove" their value to a curator or gallery. This shift in power has made it possible for self-taught and independent artists to gain recognition without institutional backing (Yang, 2024).

While some argue that the influence of social media has eroded the "prestige" associated with traditional curation, others see it as a democratisation of art. Artists no longer need to be accepted by gallery curators to achieve success. Instead, they can attract large followings on Instagram or TikTok, which can result in direct sales, partnerships with brands, and art commissions (Ginsburgh and Throsby, 2014; Kapoor et al., 2022). A prime example is artist Beeple (Mike Winkelmann), who gained prominence as a digital artist on social media before selling his NFT art piece for \$69 million at a Christie's auction. This sale marked a significant moment in art history, as

it highlighted the shift from traditional valuation models to those driven by social media popularity (Gerlis, 2014; Jurgenson, 2019). However, this shift also raises concerns. Unlike curators who are trained in art history and critical theory, social media influencers may prioritise content that is "trendy" or visually appealing over work that has deeper cultural or conceptual significance. This "aesthetic-first" approach may result in art being valued for its viral potential rather than its intellectual (Berlin Art Grid, 2023; Manovich, 2017).



Yayoi Kusama's Infinity Mirror Rooms are immersive art installations that use mirrors to create the illusion of endless space. Kusama, a Japanese artist, is known for her obsession with patterns, especially polka dots, and repetition. In these rooms, mirrors reflect objects, lights, and even the viewer, creating the feeling of being surrounded by infinite space.

The Infinity Rooms are interactive, encouraging viewers to step inside and experience the art from within. These installations play with perception and challenge our sense of reality, often using vibrant colors and lights to create a dream-like atmosphere. Kusama's work

explores themes of infinity, the self, and the universe, making the Infinity Mirror Rooms one of her most famous and influential creations.

The influence of social media curators and influencers can have profound effects on artists' careers and the commercial value of their work. Unlike gallery shows, which typically reach a limited local audience, social media posts can reach millions of viewers worldwide in seconds. This wider exposure increases demand for the artist's work, which can raise its market value (Kapoor et al., 2022). Artists like Yayoi Kusama have embraced social media as a way to extend the reach of their exhibitions. Kusama's Infinity Mirror Rooms became a global sensation in part due to Instagram's aesthetic. Visitors posted selfies within the rooms, which fuelled the exhibit's popularity and made it one of the most visited art installations in recent years (Manovich, 2017; Berlin Art Grid, 2023). This "shareable" quality of art creates a feedback loop where visibility leads to popularity, which then raises the perceived value of the work (Jurgenson, 2019).

The valuation of art has also become linked to social proof—visible measures of popularity such as likes, comments, and shares. Artists who receive high engagement on social media are seen as having more "value" in the eyes of collectors, brands, and galleries. This has led to an increase in collaborations between artists and commercial brands, where artists' online followings are leveraged as a form of marketing. Brand partnerships further boost an artist's commercial value, as seen in collaborations between visual artists like

Takashi Murakami and brands like Louis Vuitton (Gerlis, 2014; Ginsburgh and Throsby, 2014).

The role of influencers and digital curators in shaping artistic value cannot be overstated.

As social media continues to democratise the art world, the power to shape taste and value has shifted from gallery curators to influencers, bloggers, and online platforms.

Influencers and digital curators shape public taste and create new paths for artists to achieve visibility and commercial success. The practise of tagging, reposting, and featuring artists on social media gives new meaning to what it means to be "discovered" in the art world. However, this shift also raises questions about the role of art in valuation. While traditional curators relied on expertise and knowledge, social media curators often prioritise visual appeal and viral potential. Despite this, the influence of these figures is undeniable, as seen in the rise of artists like Beeple, Yayoi Kusama, and emerging creatives featured on platforms like @contemporaryartdaily and @girlgaze (Rettberg, 2014; Yang, 2024).

The rise of social media platforms has fundamentally changed the valuation of artistic work in contemporary society. The power to shape public taste and artistic value has shifted from traditional gatekeepers, such as gallery curators and art critics, to social media influencers, digital curators, and online content creators (Ginsburgh and Throsby, 2014; Jurgenson, 2019). This shift has opened access to artistic exposure, allowing artists to bypass traditional art institutions and gain visibility on a global scale. While this change has created new opportunities for artists, it

has also introduced new challenges regarding aesthetic trends, the role of metrics, and questions about the true value of art (Kapoor et al., 2022; Berlin Art Grid, 2023).

One of the most significant changes brought about by social media is the role of influencers and digital curators in shaping public taste. Unlike traditional art curators, who often operate within the confines of galleries and museums, social media influencers curate online feeds that reach millions of people worldwide. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Pinterest offer visually-driven environments where influencers and curators can promote specific artistic styles, themes, and creators (Manovich, 2017). Where accounts like

@contemporaryart.daily have become key players in this space, acting as modern-day digital curators who determine which artists get visibility. By consistently featuring the work of emerging and established artists, these platforms influence the value of artistic work. Being featured or tagged by an influential figure on social media can dramatically increase an artist's visibility, leading to more followers, higher demand for their work, and even commercial success (Zappavigna, 2012). Influential accounts like @girlgaze, which supports female-

identifying photographers, play a vital role in promoting emerging artists, often resulting in brand partnerships, collaborations, and increased commissions. The concept of "digital endorsements" through tagging and featuring has become a modern form of validation, offering artists an opportunity to gain recognition in ways that were previously inaccessible (Rettberg, 2014).

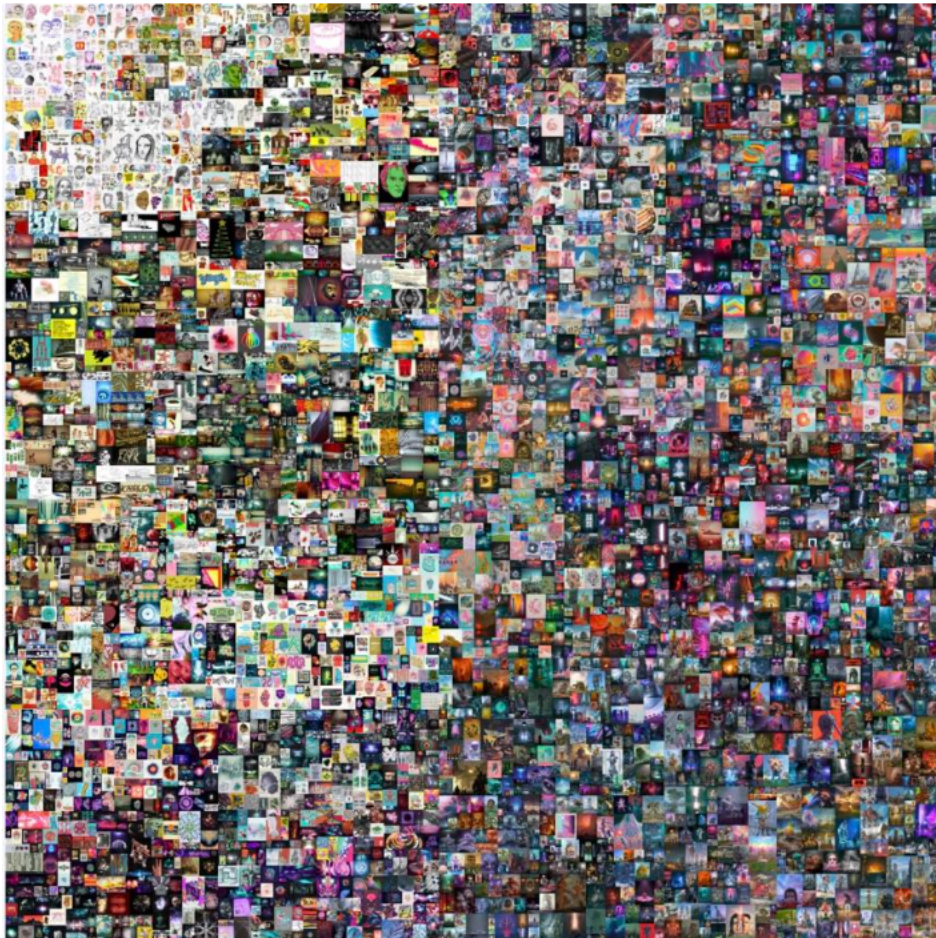
This shift from traditional gallery curators to social media influencers represents a fundamental change in how artistic value is established. In the past, gallery curators had the authority to determine which artists would be shown in exhibitions and collections, thereby controlling the visibility and financial success of artists. Today, that power is more widely distributed, as artists can self-promote on social media or be "discovered" by popular online curators and influencers (Ginsburgh and Throsby, 2014; Kapoor et al., 2022).

TikTok, for example, allows artists to showcase their creative process, leading to viral moments that can generate substantial attention. The platform's recommendation algorithm exposes users to new art content, giving creators a chance to be seen by a vast, global audience (Yang, 2024; Rettberg, 2014).

However, while social media has changed the process of art discovery, it has also created new challenges. Unlike traditional curators, who are typically trained in art history and critical theory, social media influencers may prioritise visually appealing, "trendy" content over work that carries deeper conceptual or cultural significance. This trend-driven approach has raised questions about the role of aesthetic in the valuation of artistic work (Jurgenson, 2019; Manovich, 2017).

For instance, artwork that performs well on social media may prioritise spectacle, colour, and simplicity to attract likes and shares, while more complex, thought-provoking works might receive less attention. The selling of art through social media has also led to a rethinking of artistic value. The "Instagram" quality of certain exhibitions, such as Yayoi Kusama's Infinity Mirror Rooms, illustrates how the visual appeal of an artwork can drive its popularity and perceived value. Visitors are often drawn to exhibitions that offer photo

opportunities, and the subsequent social media shares create a feedback loop of visibility and popularity. This phenomenon reveals the growing importance of "shareability" as a factor in the valuation of art. Artists who create works that encourage social media interaction—through immersive installations, interactive pieces, or striking visuals—often see an increase in market value and public interest (Berlin Art Grid, 2023).



"Everydays: The First 5000 Days" is a digital artwork by Beeple (Mike Winkelmann) made up of 5,000 images he created every day for over 13 years. The artwork shows his growth as an artist and includes a mix of futuristic, surreal, and political themes.

In March 2021, the artwork was sold as an NFT for \$69 million at an auction, making it one of the most expensive digital pieces ever sold. The sale helped popularize NFTs as a way to buy and sell digital art, with each NFT acting as proof of ownership. Beeple's work combines art, technology, and society, making him a key figure in the rise of digital art and NFTs.

The impact of social media on artistic value can also be seen in the rise of independent artists. Social media platforms provide these artists with an opportunity to showcase their work directly to audiences without requiring approval from galleries or formal institutions.

This shift has been especially important for under-represented artists who may face barriers to entry in the traditional art world. By using social media, these artists can gain recognition and financial success on their own terms (Kapoor et al., 2022; Rettberg, 2014).

For example, the digital artist Mike

Winkelmann leveraged his social media following to sell an NFT for \$69 million at Christie's auction. This event highlighted the growing power of social media-driven popularity in defining artistic value (Gerlis, 2014; Manovich, 2017). The artwork is a large digital collage made up of 5,000 smaller

images that Beeple created every day for 13 years. Each image is unique and reflects different moments in time, including world events, pop culture, and his personal creative journey. All of these images were put together to form one big digital artwork that tells a story about Beeple's growth as an artist and the evolution of digital art as a whole.

This sale was unique because it was the first auction at Christie's to accept cryptocurrency (Ethereum) as payment. The person who bought the NFT was Vignesh Sundaresan, also known as MetaKovan, who is a well-known investor and collector in the cryptocurrency space. This purchase made Beeple one of the most valuable living artists in the world, alongside well-known artists like Jeff Koons and David Hockney (Yang, 2024).

An NFT is a digital certificate of ownership that proves someone owns a unique piece of art, music, or other media. NFTs are stored on a blockchain, which makes it impossible to copy or fake ownership. While anyone can see the image online, only one person officially "owns" it. This sale sparked global interest in NFTs and caused more people to start creating, buying, and selling digital art online (Gerlis, 2014). Despite the many benefits of this new system, it is not without its downsides. The reliance on likes, shares, and comments to determine artistic value raises questions about the influence of "social proof" on the art market. Artists who receive high engagement online are often viewed as more valuable, leading to collaborations with commercial brands, sponsorships, and higher sales (Kapoor et al., 2022; Berlin Art Grid, 2023). While this system provides more opportunities for artists, it also places pressure on creators to tailor their work to the tastes of social media audiences. This pressure can sometimes compromise artistic integrity, as artists may feel compelled to create content that "performs well" online rather than work that aligns with their true creative vision (Jurgenson, 2019).

This dissertation has also connected these concepts to personal practice. By engaging in collaborative photography projects, the process of sharing prompts and exploring themes like "identity" and "nostalgia" has revealed how diverse perspectives influence artistic expression. The process of working with participants to create visual narratives illustrates how shared creative processes can deepen the meaning of art. These projects mirror the collaborative nature of social media, where multiple voices contribute to a larger creative conversation. The stories told through these projects emphasise the personal and emotional value of art, as participants' unique experiences shape the final creative outcomes (Lepp Institute of Art, 2023). In summary, social media has redefined how artistic work is valued in contemporary society. Digital curators, influencers, and online platforms have become key figures in determining which artists gain visibility, recognition, and commercial success. Through features, tags, and collaborations, these figures shape public taste, influence art market trends, and help establish the commercial value of art. The shift from traditional gallery-based curation to social media-driven exposure has changed art, providing opportunities for emerging and independent artists to succeed on their own terms. However, it has also introduced new challenges related to aesthetic trends, social proof, and the impact of algorithmic visibility. As social media continues to play a central role in the valuation of artistic work, it is essential to recognise the influence of digital curators and influencers in shaping public perception, artistic trends, and the commercial success of contemporary artists (Rettberg, 2014; Yang, 2024).

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List of Illustrations

Figure 1: Beeple, "Everydays: The First 5000 Days" (2021) – Digital collage, 5000 images, NFT.

Figure 2: Yayoi Kusama, "Infinity Mirror Room" (2016) – Mirror installation with LED lights, dimensions variable.

Peter McKinnon – Men Around a Fire in the Snow (Cinematic storytelling in outdoor photography)

Brandon Woelfel – Woman in Denim Race Jacket (Instagram aesthetic and lighting style)