

THE IGNORANT CURATOR

*Or, One Suggestion for Audience Emancipation
Through Collective Ownership of Art*

Clara Donadoni

Master's Thesis
International Master's Program in Curating Art, including Management and Law
Department of Culture and Aesthetics at Stockholm University
Autumn 2024

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the collective ownership of art, applying aesthetic theory, sociology, and Sasseurean semiotics to analyze three case studies, each illustrating distinct approaches to collaboratively curated collections. The first case, Collection Collective, proposes a speculative institution founded by arts professionals to explore a shared curatorial credo. The second, Arte Collectum I, examines a traditional art fund to reveal how investment institutions shape curatorial strategies and influence contemporary art discourse. The final case, Salon DAO, examines a decentralized art buyers' club that integrates blockchain technologies with the physical art world, functioning as a hybrid institution. Together, these examples provide insights into alternative ownership models, curatorial practices, and their implications for art production, audience engagement, and the shaping of art history. By critically examining these frameworks, this research contributes to ongoing discussions about the democratization of art production and the potential for reshaping art historical narratives through collective curatorial practices.

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INTRODUCTION

“The common power is the power of the equality of intelligences. This power binds individuals together to the very extent that it keeps them apart from each other; it is the power each of us possesses in equal measure to make our own way in the world. What has to be put to the test by our performances—whether teaching or acting, speaking, writing, making art, etc.—is not the capacity of aggregation of a collective but the capacity of the anonymous, the capacity that makes anybody equal to everybody. This capacity works through unpredictable and irreducible distances. It works through an unpredictable and irreducible play of associations and dissociations.”¹

(Jacques Rancière, “The Emancipated Spectator”)

Curators should be ignorant (and in most cases, they already are). Much like Rancière’s *Ignorant Schoolmaster*, which reflects Joseph Jacotot’s radical idea that: “an ignorant person could teach another ignorant person what he did not know himself” the concept of the ignorant curator provokes a reimagining of the curator’s role.² This positioning does not imply neglect or ineptitude but envisions a world of disseminated and shared curation, where the curator’s task is not to dictate what art is “right” or how it should be displayed. Instead, they cultivate a modality of engagement, encouraging others to interpret and consume knowledge on their own terms, foregrounding a radical equality of intelligences.

This thesis investigates how collective ownership and participatory curation reconfigure the relationship between art, curators, and audiences, fostering a more inclusive and egalitarian cultural landscape. This theoretical approach provides a critical foundation for examining how such practices not only challenge institutional authority but also empower individuals to engage more deeply and meaningfully with art. I propose that collective ownership is a pivotal mechanism for emancipating audiences, not merely as spectators but as active co-creators of meaning. By reframing collective ownership as a framework for engaging audiences in the curatorial process, we can explore how these structures might

¹ Jacques Rancière, “The Emancipated Spectator” *Art Forum*, March 2007, 279.

² Rancière, “The Emancipated Spectator,” 271.

democratize access to cultural production, challenge institutional gatekeeping, and foster more equitable conditions for artists. This reframing also shifts the focus from centralized curation to participatory models where audiences are empowered to curate their own collections, shaping artistic narratives that reflect their diverse experiences and values. And what is more, through understanding audiences as empowered collectives I posit that the systems of art consumption can better reflect the collaborative ways in which contemporary art is produced. The discussion will investigate how collective ownership disrupts the commodification of art and knowledge while creating more inclusive opportunities for artistic production and engagement. By seeing curatorship not as a methodology but as a discursive practice of meaning making and by allowing audiences to become co-curators, collective ownership could transform the systemic power dynamics of the art world. This transformation not only aligns with the principles of intellectual emancipation but also challenges conventional notions of authorship, authority, and value in art. Through a participatory-curatorial lens, this thesis will explore how models such as art funds, community-driven art collectives and Decentralized Autonomous Organizations (DAOs) embody this reframing, offering new possibilities for participatory curation and the redistribution of cultural capital. My intent is to focus on collective forms of building a collection, be they from collectives of arts professionals, from collectors or from art funds. All these realities are put on the same playing field because, at the bottom line, they reflect the same practice of a group of people coming together to assemble a collection of artworks. All the case studies, though, interact with the economics of the art world differently. The first case study of Collection Collective openly criticises the effects capitalism had, and continues to have, on the art world. And the Collective throws this *j'accuse* from the unique standpoint of having risen from the ashes of the fallen Eastern Bloc. The second case study looks at a group of esteemed and uber-established curators (along with a gallerist, a collection manager and a few financiers) who embraced the financialization of art with open arms, as the most natural landing of a successful career in the art world. As a synthesis of these two realities we shall examine a hybrid experiment: Salon DAO is a smaller art-buyers club which uses blockchain to horizontally distribute all decision making amongst its collectors-turned-curators. In a way the latter case study hopes to bridge the private and public art worlds to create a collection that seamlessly reflects the desires of those who own it.

The inspiration to rethink art ownership originally came from the third volume of *Future Art Ecosystems: Art x Decentralised Tech* (FAE3) published by Serpentine Arts

Technologies in 2022 and written by Victoria Ivanova and Gary Zhexi Zhang. This briefing explores the transformative potential of decentralized technologies such as blockchain, DAOs (Decentralized Autonomous Organizations), and NFTs (Non-Fungible Tokens) in reshaping cultural infrastructure, particularly within the intersection of art and advanced technologies. It examines the operational, conceptual, and infrastructural shifts required to integrate these technologies into cultural ecosystems while upholding public value and wider societal participation. FAE3 directly informs discussions on reframing art ownership by emphasizing the transition from exclusive, centralized systems to pluralistic, networked approaches. A key contribution of FAE3 is its critique of traditional governance models within the cultural sector.³ It highlights how centralized governance often entrenches economic and social inequalities, limiting public engagement and participatory ownership. Rather than advocating for the wholesale replacement of traditional institutions, FAE3 emphasizes the value of hybridizing legacy systems with decentralized frameworks. This involves integrating tools like smart contracts and modular governance into existing structures to enhance their adaptability and inclusivity. The briefing served as a trampoline for the thesis' exploration of different modalities for restructuring governance in art funds and collectives. This text investigates and expands on FAE3's argument that decentralized models could mitigate institutional biases, promote inclusivity, and enable communities to actively shape cultural and creative outputs. However, these new technologies will not be a central focus to the text.

Aims of Inquiry

The status quo in the art world concentrates economic and decision-making power in the hands of collectors and institutions, sidelining the broader network of contributors, including artists, communities, and collaborators who play critical roles in the creation and contextualization of art. This thesis critiques these entrenched power dynamics and explores alternative frameworks for art ownership that better align with the networked and collaborative nature of artistic production and distribution. I argue that ownership holds the potential to reexamine and reshape the power structures and inequalities that pervade the art ecosystem today. Conventional systems of distribution and engagement often fail to acknowledge the interconnected processes behind art creation, which involve not only artists but also communities, historical contexts and informal contributors. By reducing art to a marketable asset, these systems neglect the social and communal dimensions that underpin

³ Victoria Ivanova and Gary Zhexi Zhang, *Future Art Ecosystems Vol. 3: Art x Decentralised Tech*, November 2022, Serpentine R&D Platform, London.

much of contemporary artistic practice. This research posits that co-ownership can serve as a transformative tool for binding a community through shared interests and commitments to a collective identity narrative. Through this lens, collective ownership is examined not only as a mechanism for equitable distribution but as a foundational framework for fostering more inclusive, participatory, and dialogical curatorial practices.

The core question of the research is whether ownership can be a key to reshaping the power structures and inequalities present in the world of art. I will tackle the question by looking into three alternative systems that better acknowledge the interconnected, collaborative processes behind art creation and that involve not just artists but the communities around them, their historical contexts and the informal contributors who influence creation.

Case Studies

These case studies reflect a model of authorship that is not singular but disseminated across multiple agents, each contributing to the narrative and meaning-making in ways that challenge traditional notions of individual artistic authority.

The first one examines Collection Collective, a speculative institution where arts professionals collaboratively experiment with the ownership, production, and curation of a public art collection. This initiative challenges the conventional paradigms of private and institutional art ownership by positioning itself as a shared, non-hierarchical model. Emerging from the post-Communist void in institutional support within Eastern Europe, Collection Collective builds on the framework of tranzit.org, a transnational network of arts professionals and institutions that spans Europe, with a particular focus on the challenges faced in former Eastern Bloc nations. It was conceived as an alternative to the status quo, addressing what its members perceive as the impossibility of expressing dissident voices within increasingly commodified and homogenized global art markets. By questioning the economic and ideological dependencies of existing cultural institutions, Collection Collective envisions a new kind of public art collection. This collection operates as a communal economy, where objects are imbued with shared cultural meaning rather than being reduced to commodities. The methodology Collective focuses on inclusivity and mutual recognition. Members contribute to the collective according to their skills and expertise, embodying principles of solidarity over competition. Through collective decision-making and self-curated exhibitions, the collective envisions a socially and politically engaged practice of collecting that challenges market-driven hierarchies and promotes an ethics of care in cultural

production. This case study provides a lens through which to interrogate how cooperative ownership models can address the marginalization of contemporary art and artists, particularly in regions marked by systemic instability and economic disenfranchisement. It also raises questions about the viability of such models in reimagining the cultural and institutional frameworks that sustain art collections today.

Arte Collectum I exemplifies a pioneering art fund that navigates the intersections of art, finance, and social activism. This second case study offers a stark contrast to the grassroots ethos of Collection Collective by operating within a traditional investment-driven framework. Arte Collectum is an art fund that exemplifies the intersection of financialization and curatorial practice. The fund's mission is to recalibrate art history by focusing on acquiring works by underrepresented voices, primarily women and artists from diverse cultural and geographic backgrounds. Under the stewardship of Lars Nittve, alongside figures like Magnus af Petersens and Niklas Belenius, the fund's acquisitions are guided by a deliberate strategy to address historical inequities in the art market. Building on the conceptual framework of Nittve's earlier initiative, *The Second Museum of Our Wishes*, which diversified the Moderna Museet's collection by introducing significant works by women artists, Arte Collectum adopts a more comprehensive approach. This focus reflects a commitment to reshaping the dominant art historical narrative, bringing visibility to voices traditionally sidelined in the canon. Arte Collectum's methods also highlight the tension between activism and market logic. While promoting equity and the recalibration of historical hierarchies, it simultaneously instrumentalizes these narratives for financial gain. This fund primarily acquires artworks with the explicit intent of enhancing their economic and symbolic value, storing them in freeports while its curators optimize their status as investment assets. By strategically partnering with institutions for exhibitions and retrospectives, the fund amplifies the cultural and economic value of its holdings, blending curatorial vision with financial objectives. This approach highlights the interplay between curatorial strategies and the commodification of art, drawing attention to how artworks are framed not only as cultural artifacts but also as economic instruments. By examining Arte Collectum, the thesis delves into the implications of curatorial practice when aligned with financial imperatives, exploring the ways in which meaning, value, and ownership are constructed and mediated within such contexts. This dynamic, while transformative in some respects, raises ethical questions about the commodification of activism and the role of curators as both cultural arbiters and market participants.

Third is Salon DAO, a groundbreaking experiment in decentralized governance and art curation, merging blockchain technology with the ambitions of a classic arts buyers-club. Founded in 2022 by Jordan Huelskamp, Salon distinguishes itself as the first decentralized art fund designed to foster direct, community-driven engagement in the collection and stewardship of contemporary art. Huelskamp, drawing from her curatorial leadership experience at Artsy and her involvement with the Young Collectors Council at the Guggenheim Museum, envisioned a model that would disrupt hierarchical decision-making in the art world. Her ambition was to use web3 technology to reimagine institutional practices, creating a platform where members could collaboratively shape an art collection, free from the constraints of conventional governance structures. Salon adopts the structure of a Decentralized Autonomous Organization (DAO). This setup allows its members to equally participate in decision-making processes, from selecting acquisitions to determining the collection's long-term vision. Every artwork acquired is hosted by individual members, creating a dynamic interaction between personal and collective stewardship. Salon exemplifies how decentralized technology can be harnessed to democratize art ownership while working with traditional power structures in the art market. The third chapter dives into the potential and limitations of such a model, reflecting on how Salon's approach aligns with broader discussions of equity, participation, and technological innovation in the arts.

Theories

This research adopts a conception of curatorial practice that does not see the curatorial as a methodology for inquiry, as is the case of the experimental nature of the case studies. Instead, the curatorial examined here is understood as a process of meaning-making, and identity narrative production both through an intentional effort of curators but also within the intimate sphere of each audience member's subjectivity. This curatorial perspective deals with the possibility of an alternative mode of knowledge production, one that aligns with Foucauldian theories on *power-knowledge* by furthering a micro-utopian approach to subjectivity. Such an approach inherently resists the productive mechanisms of power, embedding resistance within the discourse of curatorial practice and the processes shaping contemporary art production. Michel Foucault's books *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969/1989) and *The Care of the Self* (1978/1984), as well as in his collection of essays and lectures *Power/Knowledge* (1980) all together contain the critical lens applied in this thesis.⁴ Foucault

⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol.3: The Care of the Self*, trans. Robert Hurley (1978; Pantheon Books, 1986).

Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (1969; Pantheon Books, 1989).

argues that knowledge is not a neutral entity but a construct shaped by discursive practices, inherently tied to power structures. In this view, the production of knowledge is both a means of exerting power and a tool for maintaining institutional hierarchies. Within the art world, this manifests in curatorial practices that determine what is seen, valued, and remembered, thereby shaping cultural narratives and artistic canons. Applied to the idea of collective ownership and participatory curation, Foucault's theories show the potential for redistributing power. Decentralized models challenge existing hierarchies by allowing diverse voices to contribute to the production of knowledge. Such frameworks resist the exclusivity of institutional authority, fostering more inclusive and pluralistic curatorial practices. This approach aligns with Foucault's notion that knowledge is dynamic, fluid, and always subject to reinterpretation, making collective curation a space for resistance and alternative meaning-making.

In a similar vein, to analyse how institutional knowledge-power can be used to wield curatorial narratives and to impact the economic value of artworks, I have looked towards Jean Baudrillard's theories. These offer a critical framework for examining how cultural meaning interacts with other value systems outside that of art. In his early works *The System of Objects* (1968/1996) and *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1972/1981), Baudrillard interrogates the commodification of cultural objects, focusing on the interplay between economic exchange value, symbolic value, and sign value.⁵ He posits that in modern economies, objects are stripped of their intrinsic meanings and reconstituted as signs within systems of exchange and consumption. This semiotic dimension of value, he argues, often eclipses both the practical utility and symbolic resonance of objects, situating them within a network of meanings defined by their relationships to other objects. Baudrillard's analysis is particularly relevant for understanding art as a commodity. He highlights how the aura of authenticity, tied to an artist's signature or a work's place in an artistic lineage, becomes a critical mechanism for establishing sign value. Artworks, then, are not only objects of aesthetic appreciation but also carriers of cultural and economic power, manipulated within the marketplace to serve both speculative and institutional interests. By applying Baudrillard's insights, this thesis explores how curatorial and collective practices engage with, reinforce, or resist these dynamics in their efforts to create alternative forms of value and knowledge production. While Foucault illuminates the mechanisms through which power operates in the production of knowledge, Baudrillard extends this inquiry by examining how

Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972/1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall and John Mepham (Pantheon Books, 1980).

⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (1968; Verso, 1996) 73-106;

Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin (1972; St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981) 102-122.

such systems impact the commodification of cultural objects. In art, where sign value often outweighs both use and symbolic value, the power to shape curatorial narratives becomes a tool for economic speculation. Together, Foucault and Baudrillard's perspectives offer a critical framework for analyzing how cultural and economic forces intersect in the curatorial practices and ownership structures explored in this thesis.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theory of rhizomes helped to see how power could be shared and spread across a multiplicity of audience-turned-co-curators. Content wise, the thesis treats a declaredly anti-hierarchical argument which is better understood by adopting the theory of assemblages formulated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980/1987). In the book, the two authors discuss rhizomes: systems of fungal networks that aren't organized according to an arboreal hierarchical structure, but as an interconnected system of equal bulbous nodes.⁶ Deleuze and Guattari's concept of rhizomes offers a compelling framework for rethinking organizational structures in curatorial practice and collective ownership. Unlike traditional tree-like (arborescent) models, which are hierarchical and rooted in binary logic, rhizomatic systems emphasize horizontal connectivity, multiplicity, and decentralization. Rhizomes are defined by their principles of connection and heterogeneity: any node can connect to any other, and the structure itself is constantly evolving through these interactions. Deleuze and Guattari's theory of assemblages provides a useful lens for understanding how these rhizomatic structures function. Assemblages are not static entities but dynamic groupings of heterogeneous components (human, material, and conceptual) that come together in specific configurations to produce meaning and action. Within the context of collective curation, an assemblage might include the curators, the artworks, the audience, and the digital or physical spaces where these interactions occur. Each element plays a role in shaping the overall system, yet no single component holds absolute authority. Instead, the assemblage operates through a continuous process of becoming, adapting to the changing needs and contributions of its participants. By adopting this rhizomatic and assemblage-based perspective, the thesis explores how curatorial practices can function as sites of shared agency and collective production of meaning. It interrogates how these non-hierarchical structures challenge long-held notions of authorship and authority, offering new possibilities for democratizing the production and dissemination of knowledge in the art world. Through Deleuze and Guattari's theories, the analysis situates collective curation within a broader philosophical framework that values plurality, adaptability, and the dissolution of fixed hierarchies.

⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) 3-25.

To examine how knowledge-power is enacted within and from the audience's perspectives, I looked to Jacques Rancière's essay, already quoted at the head of this introduction, "The Emancipated Spectator" (2004/2007), originally presented as a lecture and later published in *Art Forum*.⁷ The text is an expansion on his book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (1987/1991), where Rancière articulates the role of educators in fostering individual liberation.⁸ *The Emancipated Spectator* builds upon these ideas by shifting focus from the classroom to the art world, exploring the role of spectatorship in processes of meaning-making and agency. In the essay, Rancière critiques the traditional hierarchical model of engagement, which positions spectators as passive recipients of meaning to be activated or enlightened by the artist or curator. Instead, he proposes a model of emancipation that recognizes the spectator as an active participant in constructing meaning. Spectatorship, for Rancière, is not a passive condition but an act of interpretation, where individuals connect the artwork to their own experiences and frameworks. This dynamic undermines the presumed authority of the artist or curator, inverting traditional hierarchies of cultural production and fostering a more egalitarian relationship between creators and audiences. Rancière's theories resonate strongly with the aims of collective ownership and participatory curation explored in this thesis. His idea that spectatorship involves an interplay of individuality and collectivity aligns with the rhizomorphic nature of collective curatorial models, where decentralized networks of participants collaborate in shaping narratives. This framework supports the notion of curatorial practices as collaborative discourses that invite audiences to co-create meaning. By reframing spectatorship and curation as active, emancipated processes, Rancière provides a critical lens for examining how collective ownership can democratize the production of knowledge and meaning in the art world.

Suggested Methodology of Reading

Deleuze and Guattari, in their analytical quest, depart from a discussion on books that serves as a metaphor for their approach to knowledge and thought. By viewing books and writings as assemblages, they reject the "tree-like" model of books and knowledge, which is hierarchical, linear, and binary. In the arboreal model, ideas branch out from a central trunk (a main argument or thesis) and maintain a fixed order of progression. They caution against viewing books as merely reflective of the world or as transcendent objects above it.⁹ Instead,

⁷ Jacques Rancière, "The Emancipated Spectator," *Art Forum*, March, 2007.

⁸ Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (1987; Stanford University Press, 1991).

⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 5.

the rhizomatic model, which we will further explore later, proposes an approach to text as if it were actively participating in the world. Writings are tools, machines, or agents of change that have the power to create new realities and not just to represent them.¹⁰ This is the mindset I embodied to orient my research and while writing this text: warning my judgment against proceeding along the bias of a single configuration of co-ownership as taking prominence over the others. One of the case-studies being *better* than the others. Rather, proceeding without the presumption of the existence of an ultimate truth. I propose that as I conducted this study, the reader too should engage with the material as a collection of open-ended, experiential encounters that resist closure and definitive interpretation. This text does not need to be read linearly. You are invited to jump around.

Materials and Research Methodology

The case studies are based on their relevance to the topic and on the unique way they approach the issue of collective curation and co-ownership. All of them depart from different modalities and land on comparable grounds. Afterwards, I approached the people whom I considered vital to the curation of the collections that were to be put into focus. The interviewees participating in the present text were invaluable in order to open new pathways and speculations over collective ownership. These were freeform conversations which served to provide a glance into their subjective experiences. Lars Nittve, director of Arte Collectum I, provided a personal account of his curatorial mission to platform underrepresented voices in the history of art.¹¹ Magnus af Petersens, curator of Arte Collectum, elucidated my understanding of the activities of the Swedish art fund.¹² Thirdly, for the Salon case study, I received invaluable information from its founder, Jordan Huelskamp.¹³ Since it is precisely the interviewees' subjective views being analyzed, the interviews had no need to be standardized for any comparative judgement. Preceding our conversations I familiarized myself with materials about them: previous interviews, articles written by, or about them, the works. In researching each specific person, inspiration and curiosity guided the formulation of the questions that would eventually be asked. The participants were contacted by e-mail and received just a few sentences on what the subject of the research would be, along with a consent form and my curriculum vitae. It was imperative to not disclose, prior to our conversations, what the objective and aims were in conducting this study. In some cases, my

¹⁰ Ibid., 11.

¹¹ Lars Nittve, interview by the author, Zoom, October 30, 2023.

¹² Magnus af Petersens, interview by the author, Stockholm. October 17, 2023.

¹³ Jordan Huelskamp, interview by the author, Zoom, October 23, 2023.

interlocutors were made aware of the motivating reasons behind my inquiries only at the end of our interview, more as an informal end to our conversation to gauge if they had any utopic dreams on the impact of art funds on the art world at large.

Concerning the second case of the Arte Collectum art fund, I have interviewed the fund's director, Lars Nittve, as well as the curator, Magnus af Petersens who had formerly worked at Moderna Museet, Whitechapel Gallery and Bonniers Konsthall. When this interview is quoted in the present text, those excerpts were transcribed from the audio recording of our live meeting in af Petersens' Stockholm office. Afterwards I had the chance to interview Lars Nittve as well, the director of the fund, who corroborated all the information I had already gathered.¹⁴

Magnus af Petersens kindly gave me a hardcover 170-odd page catalogue of the fund's collection titled "Arte Collectum I: Other Stories".¹⁵ The edition I consulted was a sample from the printing press, not the final edition, which af Petersens was in the process of finalizing at the time of our meeting. This volume isn't purchasable, but only intended to be distributed to the fund's investors. The catalogue's comments are written by af Petersens to introduce each artist's practice and specific artworks and it features a Preface by Jonas Höglund, co-founder and CEO of Arte Collectum,¹⁶ and an Introduction by Lars Nittve as chair of the investment committee.¹⁷ Since this book is aimed at investors who, in most cases, are not knowledgeable in the field of art, in it, af Petersens also makes a point to familiarize the collectors to broader themes from the curatorial world and provide them with interpretational keys. These sections are printed on orange cardboard of a smaller format than the rest of the book and divide the volume in four segments. Some of the titles include: "Postcolonialism," "Forbidden Desires," "Modern Weaving and Textiles from the Bauhaus". This book is used not only as a primary source of what artists the fund is invested in, but also to analyze Nittve and af Petersens' function as a curators of the art fund and, in a countertransference sort of way, what kind and how much knowledge of the artworld the investors are assumed to have from the curator's perspective. Regarding the material correlated to the exhibitions that included some of the artworks from the Arte Collectum I Collection. Such documentation was gathered online and treated as peripheral confirmation of the information already acquired through the interviews I conducted.¹⁸ The shows in

¹⁴ More information on Nittve's curriculum vitae in the dedicated chapter.

¹⁵ Magnus af Petersens, introductions by Jonas Höglund and Lars Nittve, *Arte Collectum I – Other Stories* (Stockholm: Arte Collectum, 2023).

¹⁶ Jonas Höglund, "Preface" in *Arte Collectum I – Other Stories* (Stockholm: Arte Collectum, 2023).

¹⁷ Lars Nittve, "Introduction" in *Arte Collectum I – Other Stories* (Stockholm: Arte Collectum, 2023).

¹⁸ "Action, Gesture, Paint: Women Artists and Global Abstraction" Whitechapel Gallery website, 2023.

question aren't directly curated by the fund so I thought it fit to rely mostly on the Collection catalogue I was given by af Petersens as that was the most immediate curatorial result produced by the Arte Collectum team.

To analyze Salon DAO, this research relied on a combination of primary and secondary materials, focusing on the organization's publicly available resources and external commentary. Central to this analysis was Jordan Huelskamp's whitepaper, *Introducing Salon, the Decentralized Art Fund* which articulates the fund's mission, structure, and curatorial philosophy.¹⁹ This foundational document provided insights into the rationale behind Salon's innovative governance model and its use of blockchain technology within the art world. Complementing this primary source were interviews with Huelskamp published in various magazines and featured in podcasts, which offered nuanced perspectives on the operational challenges and aspirations of the DAO.²⁰ Furthermore, as previously mentioned, I conducted a personal interview with Huelskamp via Zoom, which provided an opportunity to explore specific aspects of Salon's functioning and philosophy in greater depth, while clarifying points not covered in public materials. Additionally, the Salon Collection, as displayed on the fund's website, was examined to assess the curatorial outcomes of the DAO's decision-making processes.²¹ By analyzing the featured artworks, their contextual framing, and accompanying descriptions, the research sought to unpack the relationship between the collective governance model and the artistic narrative constructed by the collection. Together, these sources were triangulated to construct a comprehensive understanding of Salon DAO, highlighting its role as a hybrid institution operating at the intersection of decentralized technology, curatorial innovation, and collective ownership.

The analysis of Collection Collective relied primarily on the limited but insightful materials available about the project, including texts published by the Collective itself on their website.²² The two such texts I lingered on the most in writing about this case study are

"Jaune Quick-to-See Smith: Memory Map" Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth website, 2023.

¹⁹ Jordan Huelskamp, "Introducing Salon, the Decentralized Art Fund," *Medium*, August 23, 2022.

²⁰ Jordan Huelskamp and Charlie Jarvis, "The Women Making the Art World More Equitable Through Tech," interview by Ariana Marsh. *Harpers Bazaar*, January 10, 2023;

Jordan Huelskamp, Casey Lesser and Elena Soboleva, "Contemporary Art in the Post-Internet Age," *HURS*, October 25, 2022;

Jordan Huelskamp, "How Might a DAO Remake Art Collecting? Salon Is About to Find Out," interview by Min Chen, *Jing Culture & Crypto*, September 7, 2022;

Jordan Huelskamp, "Salon's Jordan Huelskamp on Collecting Art as a Community" podcast interview by Adam Green, *ArtTactic*, April 25, 2024.

²¹ "Our Collection," Salon DAO, April 20, 2023

²² "Brief History," *Collection Collective*, 2018.

Țichindeleanu, Ovidiu. "Collecting Outside the Belly of the Beast," *Collection Collective*, 2018.

Vlad Morariu, "Collection Collective: Rethinking Function, Ownership and Possession," *Collection Collective*, from "Applied Baudrillard", Oxford Brookes, September 5-7, 2018.

Ovidiu Țichindeleanu's article "Collecting Outside the Belly of the Beast" (2018) and Vlad Morariu's "Collection Collective: Rethinking Function, Ownership and Possession" (2018). Morariu's article is an extended version of a conference by the same title he held at "Applied Baudrillard: 2nd International Multidisciplinary Conference on Baudrillard Studies" (Oxford Brookes, 2018). These writings not only reflect on the conceptual roots of the Collective but also situate it within broader theoretical and cultural discourses about collective ownership and curatorial practice. A key resource was the review of one of the Collection's shows, which offered valuable insights into the contents of their collection and the ethos behind their curatorial decisions.²³ Although external commentary on Collection Collective remains sparse, I gathered supplementary materials through the public documentation of their symposiums and exhibition, which provided additional context to their operations and methodologies.²⁴ The exhibition in question is that held at tranzit.sk in Bratislava from October to November 2017, *Collection Collective: Template for a Future Model of Representation* which was curated by Judit Angel, Vlad Morariu, Raluca Voinea.²⁵ To further deepen my understanding, I explored the cultural institution Tranzit, from which Collection Collective emerged. Tranzit.org is a network of public art institutions based in Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania as well as in other countries across Europe. This exploration uncovered Elliott Jenkins' article, *Power in Numbers: The Collective Curatorial Practices of Tranzit* (2019), which provided a nuanced perspective on the mechanisms and philosophies driving collective curatorial practices. This investigation naturally led to Corina Oprea's doctoral thesis, *The End of the Curator: On Curatorial Acts as Collective Production of Knowledge* (2016), which offered a theoretical framework for interpreting Collection Collective's practices. Together, these sources informed a critical reflection on how Collection Collective operates as a speculative institution and how it challenges conventional notions of authorship, ownership, and curatorial authority within the contemporary art world.

²³ Rado Ištók, "Collection Collective: Template for a Future Model of Representation." *Temporary Art Review*, December 6, 2017.

²⁴ *Collection Collective: In the Future All Our Homes Will Be Museums*, Kunsthalle KLUB, Bratislava, 11 October 2017, Dave Beech, Valeria Graziano, Alenka Gregorič, Rado Ištók, Mira Keratová. Followed by a discussion with the curators: Judit Angel, Vlad Morariu, Raluca Voinea; *Collection Collective: Tools for Self-Representation*, 25 October 2018, Bucharest. Alenka Gregorič, Mark Wilson, Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, Tania Bruguera. Moderated by Judit Angel, Raluca Voinea, and Vlad Morariu; Maria Lind and Anca Rujoiu, Art Encounters Biennial, September 20 - October 27, 2019, Timișoara, Romania.

²⁵ *Collection Collective: Template for a Future Model of Representation*, curated by Judit Angel, Vlad Morariu and Raluca Voinea (Bratislava: tranzit.sk, October 10 - November 18, 2017).

Scope, Relevance and Miscellanea

A wealth of literature exists on the art market, on the viability of art as investment and on the strategies one might adopt in order to profitably embark on such ventures. Many of these texts were considered in laying out a history of art funds and arts buyers' clubs.²⁶ However, after having written the rest of the research, I considered it more useful to focus my analysis on matters that do not have much written about them yet. And so I focused on how curation intersects with economics and how capitalistic systems of power. A text that inspired me in bridging these two worlds is *Curating Capitalism: How Art Impacts Business, Management and Economy* by Pierre Guillet de Monthoux (2022).²⁷ Though this book doesn't consider the topic of shared ownership directly, it examines the market side of art with an eye that remains unflinching to its corruptions.

Indeed, as far as previous literature goes, most of the texts cited here as having inspired the research topic in the first place are the only ones I could even find on the subject of collective ownership of art collections.²⁸ More has been said, in recent years though, on the notion of disseminated authorship and audience emancipation.²⁹ These are views which I used to supplement my analysis with the curatorial relevancy of the general topic.

It is my position that only by knowing the rules of the game, one can break them.

²⁶ Gerald Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste: The Rise and Fall of the Picture Market 1860-1960*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964;

William J. Baumol, "Unnatural Value: Or Art Investment as Floating Crap Game," *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 76, No. 2 (1986): 10-14;

Jiangping Mei and Michael Moses, "Art as an Investment and the Underperformance of Masterpieces," *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 92, No. 5 (2002): 1656-1668;

Fabian Bocart and Christian Hafner, "Volatility of Price Indices for Heterogeneous Goods With Applications to the Fine Art Market." *Journal of Applied Econometrics*, 30 (2015): 291-312;

Brian L. Frye, "New Art For the People: Art Funds & Financial Technology," *Chicago-Kent Law Review*, volume 93, issue 1 (2018): 113-139.

²⁷ Pierre Guillet de Monthoux, *Curating Capitalism: How Art Impacts Business, Management and Economy*, Experiments in Art and Capitalism, vol. III, Sternberg Press, 2022.

²⁸ Vlad Morariu, "Collection Collective: Rethinking Function, Ownership and Possession," from "Applied Baudrillard," Oxford Brookes, September 2018;

Paula Berman, Victoria Ivanova and Matt Prewitt, "Rethinking Art Ownership: Partial Common Ownership as a Step Towards a More Symbiotic Ecosystem," *RadicalxChange*, March 1, 2023;

Ivanova and Zhexi Zhang, *Future Art Ecosystems*, 2022.

²⁹ Boris Groys, "Multiple Authorship," in *The Manifesta Decade. Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe*, ed. Barbara Vanderlinden and Elena Filipovic (MIT Press, 2005) 93-102;

Corina Oprea, "The End of the Curator: On Curatorial Acts as Collective Production of Knowledge," PhD diss., Loughborough University, 2017;

Ranci re, "The Emancipated Spectator."

CORPUS

1. Collection Collective: Template for a Future Model of Representation

In most cases, the communities sharing the collections' ownership are seldom involved in their creation or care. When local communities do take part in the decision-making, these instances are rare enough to be significant in art history. One such example stands out: the acquisition of *Il quarto stato* (The Fourth State, 1898-1901) by Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, a monumental depiction of proletarian pride and resistance.³⁰ The painting was conceived in response to the Bava Beccaris massacre of 1898 in Milan, where popular protests against poor working conditions and the rising cost of bread were violently suppressed by General Fiorenzo Bava Beccaris. In 1921, the citizens of Milan rallied together to acquire this powerful image through a public subscription.

Today, this enormous artwork is housed in the Museo del '900, displayed in a public space where everyone can stop and reflect on it as a symbol of the people's resilience and the city's values. In this case, the passage of time has helped preserve the painting's significance, allowing it to serve as both a reminder and a warning about the social struggles that defined Milan's history. During the fascist dictatorship, *Il quarto stato* was famously hidden from public view for two decades, further underscoring its symbolic power. The painting's ability to withstand censorship and remain a potent icon of popular ideals speaks to its enduring relevance and the deep connection between the artwork and the people it represents. Through this example, we can see how a public collection, though often detached from its community's immediate input, can still embody and preserve the collective memory and values of a society, transforming it into a living testament to history.³¹

What inspired the members of Collection Collective was, in crux, the same principle of a collectivity coming together to seal its cultural identity. Using artworks as powerful objects, able to communicate, retain and strengthen a people's heritage is at the basis of most museological discussions. The members of this Collective speculate whether there can be an alternative system to the current established modes of collecting (from the *Kunstkammer* to

³⁰ Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, *Il quarto stato*, 1898-1901, Museo del '900, Milan, oil on canvas, 293 × 545 cm.

³¹ Eric Golo Stone, "Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo," *Flash Art*, October 21, 2015.

contemporary private collections) which are seen by the members of the *Collective* as “alibi for a narcissistic self-identification of the private subject,” an observation tapped from Jean Baudrillard’s thought, which we shall expand on later.³² The founders of Collection Collective—Judit Angel, Raluca Voinea, and Vlad Morariu—sought to break free from these models by creating something entirely different: an art collection that is not owned by an individual, but instead managed and curated collectively by its members. Positing a collective collection as a solution to an array of frustrations common within the world of contemporary art.

In late 2017, they set their plan into motion with the inauguration of *Collection Collective: Template for a Future Model of Representation*, an exhibition held at tranzit.sk in Bratislava.³³ This event marked the official founding of the Collection, as participants publicly committed to its collective ownership and stewardship. The seminar accompanying the exhibition (*Collection Collective: In the Future All Our Homes Will Be Museums*)³⁴ became a fruitful space for discussion, allowing the members to clarify the Collection’s position within the wider contemporary art landscape, define its scope and goals, and outline its guiding principles. The Bratislava convention proved essential in shaping the Collection’s direction. Following its inception, the founding members worked to expand the collective, reaching out to their personal networks and recruiting more participants. By late 2018, the membership had grown to over fifty members, solidifying the foundation for this ambitious and experimental model of artistic representation and communal ownership. Its progress was sealed by a further seminar in 2018, this time in Bucharest (*Collection Collective: Tools for Self-Representation*),³⁵ as well as by the *Collective*’s participation at the 2019 Art Encounters Biennial in Timișoara, Romania.³⁶ Ultimately, *Collection Collective* serves as a prototype for a new kind of art institution—one that challenges the conventions of contemporary collecting. Through its collective ownership and curation, it reimagines the production, presentation, and consumption of art as a shared, democratic process. This *Collective* offers a bold alternative to traditional, individualistic models of art ownership and aims to transform the very dynamics of cultural representation, its members are guided by the following principles:

³² “Brief History,” *Collection Collective*, 2018.

³³ *Collection Collective*, curated by Judit Angel, Vlad Morariu and Raluca Voinea, 2017.

³⁴ *Collection Collective*, Kunsthalle KLUB, Bratislava, 11 October 2017, Dave Beech, Valeria Graziano, Alenka Gregorič, Rado Ištók, Mira Keratová. Followed by a discussion with the curators: Judit Angel, Vlad Morariu, Raluca Voinea.

³⁵ *Collection Collective: Tools for Self-Representation*, 25 October 2018, Bucharest. Alenka Gregorič, Mark Wilson, Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, Tania Bruguera. Moderated by Judit Angel, Raluca Voinea, and Vlad Morariu.

³⁶ Maria Lind and Anca Rujoiu, Art Encounters Biennial, September 20 - October 27, 2019, Timișoara, Romania

1. “The precarity of public cultural institutions in Europe and beyond, which are facing a growing wave of right-wing populisms and nationalisms, and the demands to show value for money, fail to include works that critically address the status quo in their collections. Collection Collective represents an effort to reintroduce to the public discourse the question of political and cultural autonomy, through creating an institutional machine for empowerment, visibility, and representation.
2. The systemic conditions of cultural production, which encourage opportunism and competition between cultural workers, and whose result is the destruction of collective forms of organisation, resistance, and struggle. Collection Collective responds to the urgency of articulating sustainable models of collective legitimation and representation where collectivity is based on politics of friendship, mutual respect, and recognition.
3. The humanitarian, ecological, and political crises to which a culture based on private patronage is incapable of responding. Collection Collective does not only question whether collecting is possible beyond the whims, tastes, and likes of the private collector; it also represents an attempt to rethink the functions, roles, and purposes of collecting as a collective practice recording and shaping our contemporary condition.”³⁷

The motivation behind the first principle is clear to anyone with experience in the art world, though we will explore the specific political and historical context from which Collection Collective emerged later in this chapter. For now, I will briefly address the matter of reintroducing political and cultural autonomy to the arts sector—an issue that could easily be the subject of an entire thesis in itself. This autonomy is essential for upholding proper representation and engagement with the wider community, the most fundamental requirement to properly care for the representation of and engagement with the wider community,

³⁷ “Brief History,” *Collection Collective*, 2018.

disenfranchised from any agendas or propagandas. *Collection Collective* aims to reintroduce into the public discourse the question of political and cultural autonomy. This involves questioning the very notion of what constitutes "public" art. Historically, public institutions were meant to serve diverse communities and reflect a wide range of cultural expressions. Yet, increasingly, these institutions align with corporate interests or populist political agendas, limiting their capacity to represent a broad spectrum of voices. In response, *Collection Collective* aims to create an alternative institutional space—an “institutional machine” that operates outside these constraints.³⁸ This alternative institution is designed to empower cultural producers and promote visibility for works that critique prevailing political and social systems. By embracing a collective model for curation and collection, the project reclaims public cultural institutions as spaces for autonomy and resistance. *Collection Collective* envisions an alternative model of institutional practice that rejects the privatisation and financialization of culture, and instead foregrounds collective action, political engagement, and public accountability. In doing so, it emphasises that collections should not only be repositories of art objects, but also of ideas—ideas that challenge, provoke, and engage with the world in meaningful ways.

That said, I would offer a critical reflection on this first principle. Art, in part, thrives on the dialectical friction between its desire to influence social and political change and its need to navigate the pressures of capitalism or state-sponsored agendas. Besides, in the current climate, even the act of subsuming political artworks into institutional collections may, paradoxically, undermine their subversive power. As Jacques Rancière argues, the belief that art can subvert the social order merely by being displayed in a museum is reminiscent of how monumental paintings in palaces were once used to affirm the power of rulers.³⁹ Indeed: when art enters institutions it is often stripped of its angst, although a new kind of institution could be the key to preserving and curating the voice of artists who strive for political change.

The second principle of *Collection Collective* critiques the systemic conditions that shape cultural production, which are often rooted in competition, opportunism, and individualism. The world of contemporary art today, encourages a prevailing neoliberal

³⁸ See above, tenant 1.

³⁹ Jacques Rancière, “The Emancipated Spectator.”

approach to cultural production where individual success is prioritised over collective solidarity. Cultural workers—artists, curators and producers—find themselves caught in a race for attention, funding, and recognition, often sacrificing collaboration or collective efforts in pursuit of personal gain. This hyper-competitive environment contributes to the fragmentation of the art world, where individuals increasingly operate in isolation, rather than as part of a larger, cohesive movement. As a result, the collective struggle for shared cultural goals becomes eroded. Cultural workers face heightened precarity and are pushed to adopt market-oriented strategies to survive, often at the expense of their artistic integrity, feeding back into the vicious cycle. In the end, the commodification of the art world becomes inevitable, and its political or social relevance is diminished in favour of economic value. In this climate, the focus shifts from the potential collective impact of art to the individual success of artists and curators, who are increasingly compelled to tailor their practices to market demands rather than larger, collective political or social objectives. *Collection Collective* directly responds to these systemic challenges by proposing an alternative model that re-centers collaboration, mutual respect, and collective representation. Rather than reinforcing a competitive and fragmented environment, the Collective fosters an approach grounded in what they term "the politics of friendship."⁴⁰ This framework encourages cultural workers to collaborate not out of economic necessity, but out of shared ideological commitment and solidarity. It promotes mutual recognition, where individuals and groups contribute to the collective effort not for personal gain, but for the greater good of the community. Through this model, *Collection Collective* seeks to counteract the neoliberal pressures that dominate the art world, offering a space where the political and social significance of cultural production can thrive within a supportive, collaborative network.

The third tenet of *Collection Collective* addresses the urgent humanitarian, ecological, and political crises that are increasingly rendering the classic model of art collection—dominated by private individuals or corporations—both irrelevant and unsustainable. While this critique echoes largely reflections found in the exhibition text associated with *Collection Collective: Template for a Future Model of Representation* (2017, tranzit.sk, Bratislava, curated by Judit Angel, Vlad Morariu and Raluca Voinea).⁴¹ In the late

⁴⁰ See above, tenant 2.

⁴¹ Judit Angel, Vlad Morariu and Raluca Voinea, *Collection Collective: Template for a Future Model of Representation*, tranzit.sk, Bratislava, 2017.

20th century, collection studies gained recognition, revealing that a significant portion of the adult population in the West identified as collectors.⁴² Usually viewed as an individual pursuit driven by personal taste and desire, collecting is reimagined in this context as a potentially collective endeavour. The *Collective* challenges this conventional view by posing a key question: "Is there a possibility to invert this assumption and pose, at least as a working hypothesis, a different kind of subject: a collection collective subject? And how could this subject be imagined?"⁴³ Traditional private patronage often perpetuates the very systems and hierarchies that contribute to the crises the arts are ideally positioned to interrogate, if not challenge outright.⁴⁴ In response, *Collection Collective* seeks to reimagine the act of collecting as a socially and politically engaged practice, one capable of addressing and intervening in the urgent crises of our time, rather than merely reflecting or reinforcing them. This kind of collection is not just a passive repository of artistic objects, but an active participant in shaping the contemporary condition. By considering the collective not just as a space for the accumulation of objects, but as a mechanism for recording, reflecting on, and responding to the crises of the present, the project positions itself as a tool for collective resistance and transformation. It represents a collective attempt to subvert the individualistic and financialized model of collecting, and to imagine a new model of cultural production and preservation that is rooted in solidarity, social justice, and ecological awareness.

The *Collective* becomes a site of legitimation and representation, offering cultural producers a space to be recognized not as isolated agents, but as part of a larger, interdependent community. The project, therefore, is not only an artistic initiative, but also a political one: a response to the systemic conditions that marginalise collective action and resistance within cultural production. Both collections and collectives raise the question of what is "common"—as a shared principle of organisation and systematisation. *Collection Collective* positions itself as an effort to engage with contemporary art as a common and public good. However, the question remains: in practice, are the artworks truly public? This is the core question the collective experiment is trying to answer, using exhibition and

⁴² Morariu, "Collection Collective," 2018.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Joanna Walters, "Artist Nan Goldin stages opioids protest in Metropolitan Museum Sackler Wing," *The Guardian*, March 11, 2018

Anny Shaw, "Cash-strapped museums struggle with 'moral reckoning' over sponsors," *The Art Newspaper*, July 2, 2024.

institution making as research methods, to test their hypothetical alternative to the status quo, provoke others to critically address these thoughts and generate a dialogue on potential alternatives to move beyond the simplistic view of collections as mere repositories of exchange value or as passive storehouses of capital, to reaffirm the collections' public dimension.

Historical and Political Precedents

This text has intentionally steered clear from tackling the obvious parallels between collective ownership of art and the public property dogma of Communism. The reason for this omission, up until this point, is the sheer scale of political discourse, which is beyond the scope of a curatorial thesis. However, it is hard to ignore the post-communist context of Collection Collective, and the fact that it was funded by art practitioners all of whom were born during the dismantling of the Eastern Bloc. While politics, in the strict sense, are not the focus here, the reader might nevertheless sense the underlying political nuances woven into the fabric of Collection Collective—a project born out of the post-socialist vacuum in which many Eastern European art practitioners find themselves. A deeper exploration of the political roots of Collection Collective can be found in Ovidiu Țichindeleanu's article *Collecting Outside the Belly of the Beast* (2018), which is published on the Collective's website.⁴⁵ Țichindeleanu's text provides a critical art historical analysis of the current cultural environment in Eastern Europe, tracing its lineage from the post-Soviet period through the lens of Joseph Beuys' *Polentransport*. He draws unexpected parallels between the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the state of contemporary Eastern European art, marked by struggles over identity, autonomy, and institutional support. In this context, Collection Collective emerges as an art initiative responding to the ruptures and transformations left by the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, but it does so within the constraints and opportunities of post-socialist, post-communist realities.

A key figure in Țichindeleanu's critique of Eastern European art history is the Romanian aesthetic theorist and art critic Ion Pascadi (1932-1979). In his seminal work *Arta de la A la Z* (Art from A to Z), Pascadi discussed the growing "social status acquired by a work of art" within the communist regime. For Pascadi, artworks were not only valued for their intrinsic aesthetic qualities but also for their role in "constructing socialism."⁴⁶ The

⁴⁵ Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, "Collecting Outside the Belly of the Beast," *Collection Collective*, 2018.

⁴⁶ Ion Pascadi, *Arta de la A la Z*, (Junimea, 1978), 44.

artworks produced in this period, therefore, gained significance not merely through their cultural merit, but through their ideological function. In this context, artists were supported by the state's cultural apparatus, ensuring their access to institutional structures that provided a degree of stability and recognition. Yet, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the USSR, these institutional protections vanished, leaving many artists without the state-backed structures that had once sustained their practice. One institutional collection directly quoted by Țichindeleanu is that of... In the capitalist era that followed, artists found themselves facing new challenges. The protections once provided by socialist institutions were replaced by a harshly competitive market economy. As Țichindeleanu outlines, artists in the 1990s and early 2000s were suddenly expected to operate in a radically different environment—one in which they were forced to balance their creative work with the responsibility of creating the institutional and ideological context for that work to exist. This "double shift"⁴⁷ required them to not only produce art but also to cultivate the networks, institutions, and frameworks necessary for its visibility and survival “both at immaterial and material levels, ideological and institutional.”⁴⁸ This was a far cry from the relative support that artists enjoyed under socialism, and the transition to a neoliberal capitalist system created a contextual vacuum—an indeterminate space where artists could no longer rely on state support and institutional infrastructure to sustain their practices. In this context, many artists turned to the creation of independent networks and alternative institutions. The formation of such initiatives as *tranzit.org* and *Collection Collective* represents a response to the collapse of the socialist system and the subsequent commodification of art under capitalism (although one could argue on how independent they are while receiving state funding). While these initiatives advocate for autonomy and independence, Țichindeleanu remains critical of the intrusion of capitalist ideologies into the cultural field, lamenting the incursion of capitalism in “a cultural field increasingly dominated by void-making and obedient commodification and/or occidentalisation.”⁴⁹ This shift is not merely one of economic transformation but also of cultural identity, as Eastern European art has been forced to contend with the pressures of globalisation and the incursions of Western art markets. The radical turn from state-supported, ideology-driven art to a free-market model has left many artists adrift in a field that prizes financial gain over ideological expression.

⁴⁷ Țichindeleanu, “Collecting Outside the Belly of the Beast.”

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Collection Collective emerges as a reaction to this shift, embodying a new form of collective engagement that challenges the commodification of art by promoting collective ownership, cooperation, and mutual support among artists. It operates, therefore, not simply as a response to the immediate cultural and economic challenges of post-communism, but as an alternative to the dominant capitalist frameworks that now govern artistic production and distribution. At the heart of *Collection Collective* lies a deceptively simple guiding principle: "each member of the collective offers work according to skills and expertise."⁵⁰ This statement recalls the famous communist slogan: "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs,"⁵¹ which is recontextualized here within the cultural sector. Rather than being driven by a Marxist redistribution of wealth, the principle instead focuses on the collective provision of artistic contributions and the equitable sharing of cultural resources. The 'needs' here are not of subsistence but rather the ongoing survival and sustenance of art in a post-socialist, post-communist world. By championing a shared model of artistic and institutional support, *Collection Collective* seeks to navigate the difficult terrain of post-communist cultural production.

The Exhibition

While initially curators made subjective selections, the final collection reflects a collective process, with artists contributing works based on mutual trust and dialogue. The exhibition includes various pieces that engage with themes of self-organisation, material versus immaterial production, and resistance to consumption. An internal workshop will engage professionals from various sectors to explore how their expertise could serve a collective collection model. The exhibition's aim is to rethink the roles of cultural producers and consumers, asking why creators shouldn't also be the ones to collect and maintain art. The project is seen as both a conceptual proposal and a model for future iterations.⁵²

Seen as I have not personally attended the exhibition *Collection Collective: Template for a Future Model of Representation* (2017) it seems more appropriate to directly quote a rapid fire review of it by fellow SU alumnus, Rado Ištók, published on *Temporary Art Review*:

⁵⁰ Morariu, "Collection Collective," 2018.

⁵¹ Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 1875.

⁵² Judit Angel, Vlad Morariu and Raluca Voinea, "Collection Collective: Template for a Future Model of Representation," *tranzit.sk*, Bratislava, 2017.

The exhibition in the three rooms of tranzit.sk brought together art works which in various ways addressed the poetics and politics of collecting, categorisation, (self-)organisation and labour. As a literal and metaphorical cornerstone of the exhibition, visible from the street through the glass walls of the central room's corner, could be seen the *Private Collection* (2005-2010) by Anetta Mona Chişa and Lucia Tkáčová. Consisting of objects appropriated by the artist duo from various galleries, the work plays with the readymade aesthetics of everyday objects withdrawn from their use while at the same time foregrounds subjectivity and chance as constitutive factors of collections, as opposed to the representation of the official narrative claimed by public collections. Similarly, in her work *My Private Collection* (1990-ongoing) artist Lia Perjovschi proposes an alternative art history based on associations and deviations from the sanctioned canon, while Vlad Basalici's sculptural object *Trampling Down Death by Death* (2012) is also based on the subjective reworking of art history. Dan Mihaltianu's *Plaques tournantes* (2010), referencing both turntables and the turning points in history, is a conceptual collection of music records from both sides of the Iron Curtain standing not only for music and the associated fashion but also for the changing cultural, political and social values. Questioning of the official history and its political bias is also characteristic of Martin Piaček's works *Sun of the Nation* (2015) and *Great grandfather's War* (2013), while Ilona Németh foregrounds in her *Eight Men* (2009-2012) a tragic family history conveyed as oral history of the past twenty-five years by three generations of women. The interest in margins as rich with the potential for change has also motivated the *Basket of Deplorables* (2017) by Martina Růžicková and Max Lysáček,, referencing marginalised groups of the society such as the retired as a model group for the desired future under the conditions of the universal basic income. Labour, as an unavoidable part of the self-organised initiatives such as Collection Collective, was addressed both in its industrial and post-industrial condition. While Péter Szabó's film *Good Morning* (2009-2010) documented the artist's actions in Bucharest, Ploiesti and Sinaia in which confetti cannons welcomed the factory workers arriving to work in the morning, Jana Kapelová's video *Nylon Relations* (2017) is a collection of accounts by the artist's colleagues—women artists, curators and art historians working under precarious conditions in Slovakia. In line with the rigorous institutional critique throughout is also Martha Rosler's video *Museums Will Eat*

Your Lunch (2013) exposing the relations between the museums in the U.S.A., the interests of their private supporters, as well as their role in gentrification of the former working class neighbourhoods. *The Francis Effect* (2014-ongoing) by Tania Bruguera, whom with Rosler expanded the circle of artists from Central Eastern Europe, focuses on collecting signatures of the exhibition visitors in order to petition the Pope to grant citizenship of Vatican City to the undocumented migrants and refugees. Lastly, *The And of Art IN and FOR new* (2016-2017), titled after the eight most frequently used words in e-flux announcement titles, is an intervention by the Fokus Grupa in form of a stripe of text running throughout the whole gallery. Based on the keywords of the exhibition's curatorial text queried in the entire corpus of e-flux's disparate activities and further manipulated by rules set by the artists, the intervention, according to the artists, proposes a comparison of the Collection Collective and e-flux in their model of an artist-run collection and database of art writing, i.e. their material and immaterial production respectively.⁵³

The project also blurs the boundaries between artist and curator, embodying what Boris Groys terms "multiple authorship," a curatorship that disrupts traditional notions of singular creative ownership by emphasizing the interconnected roles of creation, selection, and presentation. In this sense, the curator is no longer a detached mediator but an active participant in the creative process, while the artist engages not only in producing works but also in shaping their context and meaning. This convergence transforms the act of curation into an extension of artistic practice and vice versa, espousing a collaborative ethos where roles overlap and dissolve.⁵⁴

This vision, in its essence, echoes the communal effort that once brought Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo's *Il quarto stato* into public ownership. Just as the citizens of Milan banded together to preserve and display a powerful symbol of their collective identity and struggle, Collection Collective seeks to reimagine how art can serve as a shared cultural and political resource. By challenging established hierarchies and fostering collaborative authorship, the Collective rekindles the spirit of that episode, not through a single monumental artwork, but by creating a platform for diverse voices and perspectives to shape

⁵³ Rado Ištok, "Collection Collective: Template for a Future Model of Representation," *Temporary Art Review*, December 6, 2017.

⁵⁴ Groys, "Multiple Authorship," 2005.

a dynamic and evolving collection. It serves as a reminder that art, at its most impactful, emerges from and contributes to the collective, offering not only a reflection of shared heritage but also a space for ongoing dialogue and resistance against systems of exclusion and oppression. Through their practices, the Collective reminds us that cultural identity is not static; like the legacy of Pellizza da Volpedo's *Il quarto stato*, it must be continually reaffirmed and renegotiated by the communities it represents.

Theoretical Anchoring

Previous literature on collections is ascribable to the field of museum studies and taps into material culture and the field of Anthropology to encompass three broad areas: (1) Collection policies in museums, which involve decisions about what to collect and what to exclude, as well as the relationship between objects and research. This includes how curators and institutions determine the value and relevance of artefacts in their collections. (2) The history of collections, which traces the evolution of collecting practices from ancient times to the present day. This area focuses on acquisition processes, documentation, and the relationship between private collections and museums, examining how these dynamics have shaped cultural and institutional practices over time. (3) The nature of collections and the motivations behind them, which looks at why people collect. This includes both overt, explicit reasons—such as personal interest or investment—as well as more complex, often unspoken motivations, like social status, psychological needs, or a desire for control over historical narratives. Together, these areas of inquiry form the foundation for understanding the phenomenon of collecting subjects and collected objects (or systems of objects) in society.⁵⁵ However, these prior studies, exemplified by Susan M. Pearce's collection of papers (*Interpreting Objects and Collections*, 1994), overlook two critical premises and fail to interrogate the institutional frameworks underpinning the practice of collecting. These assumptions are rigorously examined by Collection Collective founding member Vlad Morariu in his text *Collection Collective: Rethinking Function, Ownership and Possession* (2018) published on the Collective's website but originally conceived as a conference paper presented at "Applied Baudrillard" (Oxford, 2018).⁵⁶ The first premise posits that collecting

⁵⁵ Susan M. Pearce, 'Collecting Reconsidered,' in Susan M. Pearce (ed.) *Interpreting Objects and Collections* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 193–94.

⁵⁶ Morariu, "Collection Collective," 2018.

necessitates a private subject whose identity is intrinsically reflected and shaped through the act of accumulation—a view deeply embedded in long-established theories that emphasise personal, narcissistic attachment as borrowed by psychologists. The second assumption pertains to the temporal dimension of collections, which are often perceived as atemporal constructs that detach objects from their contemporary relevance, insulating them within a static framework. By scrutinising these paradigms, Morariu advances a critical reevaluation of collecting, proposing innovative models that prioritise collective ownership and challenge entrenched institutional practices. Morariu tackles the two issues by offering a semiological perspective on collecting, with the help of two early works by Jean Baudrillard, specifically *The System of Objects* (1968/1996) and *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1972/1981) and relating these with Walter Benjamin's essay *Unpacking My Library. A Talk about Book Collecting* (1968/2007) written in 1931.⁵⁷

Benjamin's essay articulates his passion for books, the non-utilitarian value of these collected objects, offering a first person singular peek within the private world of an authentic collector. It further explores the tension between a collection's closed order of meaning and its open-ended nature which exists in a never ending strive for owning more, or completing the collection (if such a thing is even possible).⁵⁸ The first of the two questions tackled by Morariu lies precisely in the "whimsical"⁵⁹ meaning the collection is endowed with by the collector. That is to say: is the subjectivity of a collector a necessary condition for the preservation of the collection's meaning?

The most profound enchantment for the collector is the locking of individual items within a magic circle in which they are fixed as the final thrill, the thrill of acquisition, passes over them. Everything remembered and thought, everything conscious, becomes the pedestal, the frame, the base, the lock of his property. The period, the region, the craftsmanship, the former ownership—for a true collector the whole background of an item adds up to a magic encyclopedia whose quintessence is the fate of his object. In this circumscribed area, then, it may be

⁵⁷ Walter Benjamin, 'Unpacking My Library. A Talk about Book Collecting,' in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (1968: New York: Schocken, 2007).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 61-62.

surmised how the great physiognomists-and collectors are the physiognomists of the world of objects-turn into interpreters of fate.⁶⁰

In traditional collections, when the collecting subject disappears, it would seem like the complex web of meanings, referents, the ‘magic circle’ vanishes with them. Although Benjamin believed that only ‘true’ collectors, such as himself, are capable of authentically enchanting objects, he also admitted that “I do know that time is running out for the type [of collector] that I am discussing here and have been representing before you ex officio.”⁶¹ The essay thus bridges the psychological interpretation of collecting with a semiotic understanding of collections. Which might be what brings Morariu to suggest that Baudrillard has systematically developed ideas that Benjamin had already proposed three decades earlier. However, from Morariu’s point of view, Benjamin’s objective reflection on his condition as a collector may have emerged precisely due to the disappearance of its object (the collector). Is this the case?

Not exactly, however Morariu identifies a paradigm shift underway. Within Baudrillard’s thought, as I’ve hinted at the beginning of this chapter, collecting is grounded in the idea of a narcissistic projection between the collector and their collected object. He finds a myriad of psychoanalytical justifications to collecting: narcissistic regression, the fixation on origins (maternal filiation), along with concerns about dates, signatures, and authenticity (paternal filiation), anal accumulation, fetishisation, the denial of time, and the fantasy of controlling the temporal aspects of birth and death.⁶² Though, rather than focusing on the psychological aspects of collecting, Morariu delves a step further into Baudrillard’s thought to examine collections as semiotic systems, as offering a way to understand meaning and cultural value, to move beyond a simplistic view of collections as mere vehicles for exchange value or as passive repositories of capital.

If I use a refrigerator to refrigerate, it is a practical mediation: it is not an object but a refrigerator. And in that sense I do not possess it. A *utensil* is never possessed, because a utensil refers one to the world; what is possessed is always

⁶⁰ Ibid., 60-61.

⁶¹ Ibid., 67.

⁶² Jean Baudrillard, *System of Objects*, 76 - 77, 87-88.

an object *abstracted from its function and thus brought into relationship with the subject*.⁶³

The meaning of an object, or an entire system of objects such as a collection, transcends its practical function through the collector's relationship of ownership, becoming intertwined with their personal emotional investment. As Benjamin observed, this subjectivity transforms ordinary items into “loved objects”, embedding them deeply within the collector's sense of self and identity.⁶⁴ However, Morariu challenges the idea that this subjectivity must always be central (and from here the paradigm shift): in the case of Collection Collective, the meaning of the collection emerges not from the individual subjectivity of a private collector, but from a collective process of meaning production. This collective approach reconfigures the logic of collecting, emphasising solidarity, cooperation, and mutual legitimation rather than individual ownership and narcissistic identification with objects. Thus, the author suggests that while subjectivity enhances a collection’s meaning, it is not an absolute requirement—does not constitute a condition *sine qua non* of building a system of objects. The collector’s subjectivity provides the lens through which objects acquire significance, often transcending their functional or economic value. However, this subjectivity is not static or singular; it can evolve, and in collective projects like Collection Collective, meaning is co-constructed through collaboration. By moving away from a sole, private collector's control, the collection can generate alternative modes of legitimation, emphasising solidarity over individual dominance. Thus, while subjectivity enriches a collection’s meaning, it is not a necessity—meaning can also emerge from collective, shared frameworks that challenge the current modes of ownership and signification.

Now, to the second, question about temporality: what role can the collection take on in creating meaning for the present, collecting contemporary art? Can collections shape our present reality, and if so, how? Drawing on Baudrillard, Morariu argues that collecting involves a suspension of the present, creating an artificial permanence that removes objects from their immediate socio-political context. This temporal detachment transforms collections into controlled systems that offer reassurance against existential anxieties,

⁶³ Ibid., 85-86.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 85.

particularly the inevitability of death. For Baudrillard, the act of collecting replaces real-time experience with a structured, cyclical temporality, where the collector imposes order on objects to mitigate the chaos of the present.⁶⁵ Morariu extends this idea to contemporary art, highlighting a paradox: while contemporary art claims to address the "now," its inclusion in collections erases this immediacy. By subsuming singular works into wider serial frameworks, collections neutralise their temporal and political relevance, stripping them of the capacity to engage with pressing issues in real time. The serial logic of collecting, then, risks rendering contemporary art non-contemporary, reducing its critical potential. To address this, Morariu's Collection Collective proposes an alternative approach to collecting. By emphasising collective ownership and participatory practices, the model reimagines collections as dynamic and evolving, rather than static repositories. This framework seeks to restore the immediacy and agency of collected works, positioning collections as active contributors to contemporaneity rather than as monuments to the past. Through this shift, Morariu demonstrates how collections can maintain temporal relevance and preserve a meaningful engagement with the present.⁶⁶

The time shift art is able to harness is hinged, for Baudrillard and Morariu, on the signature: the single element of legitimation which situates the artwork within various series—whether the artist's body of work, the syntagmatic structure of the cultural system, or, notably, the sequence of a collection. For Baudrillard, the only way for art to truly engage with contemporaneity is to act as a witness, "testifying to the systematic of this full world by means of the inverse and homologous systematic of its empty gesture—a pure gesture marking an absence."⁶⁷ In this context, the act of signing becomes emblematic of art's shift away from critical or subversive functions. Instead, art is subsumed by the global commodity system, treated like any other object appropriated for its sign-value. Even when art is not explicitly created as a commodity, Baudrillard contends that it is inevitably commodified through the mechanisms of serial distribution and consumption. The signature, while symbolising uniqueness and originality, paradoxically aids in this commodification by embedding the artwork within an economic and cultural framework driven by exchange,

⁶⁵ Morariu, "Collection Collective," 2018.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Baudrillard, *Critique*, 108.

accumulation, and market logic. This duality underscores the complex role of the signature in mediating art's position between authenticity and commodification in modernity.⁶⁸

Baudrillard's view of the art market highlights a structuralist semiotic exchange where artworks are valued not just for their economic worth but for their sign value, driven by the symbolic power of the signature. This transformation of economic surplus value into sign value leads to a form of domination, which he suggests is problematic for the politics of art. This semiological dimension of collecting, where objects acquire value beyond their economic function, is the very space where Collection Collective operates, engaging with the complexities of sign value and its implications for contemporary collecting.⁶⁹ As Morariu concludes in his reflections:

“The task and the challenge, then, are to reclaim signification while imagining who, or what, can fill up the empty space. Two possibilities present themselves with spectacular clarity: on the one hand, the meaningless hoarding of artworks in vaults, and the semiotic poverty of abstract serialisation; on the other hand, the possibility of rearticulating meaning, through a transformative process of collective semiotic production. Collection Collective has certainly embarked on the latter route”.⁷⁰

If Benjamin's and Baudrillard's collectors imbued their collections with subjective meaning, anchoring the significance of individual objects in their own self-identification, the abstract serialisation of contemporary collecting threatens to erase this meaning entirely. Such indeterminacies highlight the necessity of initiatives like Collection Collective. Rather than adopting the role of an anonymous, supra-subject, the Collective operates as a collaborative assembly of individuals, each contributing to a self-curated entity that acknowledges both shared affinities and unique differences. This emphasis on collective agency ensures that friendship and mutual recognition remain foundational principles guiding the development of the Collection.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 115-116.

⁶⁹ More about the interaction between sign value and economic exchange value in contemporary art in the next chapter.

⁷⁰ Vlad Morariu, “Collection Collective.”

2. Arte Collectum I: Recalibrating Art History

Arte Collectum I stands as Sweden's first—and thus far, only—art fund. In October 2023, it achieved recognition as an Article 9 “dark green” fund under the European Union’s Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation (SFDR).⁷¹ This classification represents the highest level of sustainability, as defined by the EU’s Financing Sustainable Growth Action Plan, which aims to channel investments toward a more sustainable economy.⁷² While Arte Collectum’s designation reflects its environmentally conscious framework, it owes much of this accolade to its social-activist objectives. These ambitions are central to the fund’s ethos, but they also invite questions about its efficacy and the broader implications of such initiatives in the art market. The fund’s investment committee is led by Lars Nittve, alongside committee members Deborah Gunn and Niklas Belenius. Together, they have steered Arte Collectum I toward a mission of addressing inequities in the art market by investing in artists they perceive as undervalued.⁷³ These artists have been historically sidelined and suffered critical mis-fortune for reasons that have nothing to do with the quality of their oeuvre, but because of their gender, ethnicity, geographical location of their activity and other discriminating factors. While this approach is undoubtedly progressive, it also positions Arte Collectum at the intersection of art, finance, and activism, a space fraught with challenges and contradictions. In an interview conducted for this research, Nittve reflected on the origins of Arte Collectum’s mission, citing observations from his tenure as director of Moderna Museet in Stockholm between 2001 and 2010.⁷⁴ During his leadership, the museum celebrated its 50th anniversary, prompting Nittve to revisit the legacy of his predecessor, Pontus Hultén. In 1963-64, Hultén secured five million kronor from the Swedish government to establish the *Önskemuseet* (The Museum of Our Wishes), using the funds to acquire thirty-six significant works by canonical male artists such as Salvador Dalí, Joan Miró, Piet Mondrian, and Pablo Picasso.⁷⁵ While the operation was certainly successful in its wishes, the national collection was far from representing the makeup of its nation and further still from highlighting the participation, and sometimes key role of diverse artists in the history of art. It reinforced a glaring lack of diversity within the collection, sidelining women and other

⁷¹ “Sustainability at a Glance 2023,” Arte Collectum website.

⁷² European Commission “Action Plan: Financing Sustainable Growth” Communication from the Commission (Brussels, March 8, 2018) COM/2018/097 final.

⁷³ The team was, at the moment of our interviews, in the process of creating a second art fund, hence the name Arte Collectum I.

⁷⁴ Lars Nittve, interview by the author, October 30, 2023.

⁷⁵ “History,” Moderna Museet website.

marginalized voices in art history. Determined to address this imbalance, Nittve asked the Swedish government for 50 million kronor⁷⁶ to fund *Det Andra Önskemuseet* (The Second Museum of Our Wishes) from 2006 to 2009. This project sought to rectify the representational disparities in Moderna’s collection, through a new spree of acquisitions aimed at balancing the representational bias within the Moderna collection, which swayed particularly Caucasian-male.⁷⁷ The results were significant: this second initiative aptly supplemented the collection with 26 artworks by 14 different women artists by the likes of Louise Bourgeois, Judy Chicago, Alice Neel, Liubov Popova, Monica Sjöö and Dorothea Tanning.⁷⁸ However, as Nittve and his acquisitions team observed during this process, the market’s valuation of women artists remained disproportionately low. Artworks by women who worked alongside and contributed equally to major artistic movements were frequently valued at a fraction of those by their male peers—in many cases, as little as one-twentieth. Nittve’s experience at Moderna Museet laid the conceptual groundwork for Arte Collectum. By highlighting this persistent market disparity, Arte Collectum positions itself as a fund with dual aims: correcting systemic inequities in the art world while simultaneously leveraging those same inequities to generate financial returns. Nittve notes that, while the gap has narrowed in the years since his tenure at Moderna a decade ago, female artists’ works are still often priced at about one-tenth of their male counterparts—a disparity that the fund sees as both an opportunity for investment and an indictment of the art market’s entrenched biases. The chapter will explore how Arte Collectum navigates these tensions, using its investment strategy to address inequities while remaining deeply embedded in a market system that often perpetuates the same inequalities. By examining its historical context, operational methods, and cultural impact, this study aims to uncover the complexities of aligning financial ambitions with activist goals in the contemporary art world.

Through Arte Collectum I, Lars Nittve continues the advocacy for women artists that defined much of his career as a public official, curator, scholar, and art critic. His efforts with the fund echo the work initiated during *The Second Museum of Our Wishes* (2006-2009) at Moderna Museet, but with notable shifts in focus and strategy. While all the acquisitions for Moderna’s initiative were works by women, they were exclusively white women, reflecting both the institutional priorities and market availability at the time. By contrast, the

⁷⁶ “Highlighting & The Second Museum of Our Wishes” Moderna Museet website, 2024.

The museum received 5 million kronor from the government and 37 million kronor from private donors.

⁷⁷ As to whether the bias was fully solved: no.

⁷⁸ “Highlighting & The Second Museum of Our Wishes” Moderna Museet website, 2024.

acquisitions made by Arte Collectum I are strikingly diverse.⁷⁹ Of the 41 works acquired by the fund, created by 26 artists, 21 are by women, and a significant majority of these artists are non-white, representing an array of cultural and geographic backgrounds. This difference in focus can be partly attributed to the contrasting goals and operational contexts of the two initiatives. *The Second Museum of Our Wishes* was supported by approximately 50 million Swedish kronor, enabling the museum to secure works by already established artists whose inclusion in the collection would bolster its diversity while also anchoring the institution's representation of art history. Artists such as Louise Bourgeois, Judy Chicago, and Alice Neel were sought for their importance within the canon, ensuring that their works could seamlessly integrate into permanent displays and serve as definitive markers of inclusivity. In comparison, Arte Collectum I operates within a capped budget of roughly 20 million euros, four times the funding allocated to Moderna Museet's project, and acquired twice the number of works. This disparity reflects the fund's focus on less established artists who, while commanding lower market prices, represent significant potential for both cultural and financial appreciation. The focus on emerging voices allows Arte Collectum to diversify its collected portfolio while addressing systemic biases in the art market more expansively than Moderna's initiative could within its narrower institutional parameters. Another key distinction lies in the intended use of the acquisitions. Whereas Moderna Museet's purchases were directly integrated into the museum's collection, with a clear goal of public display, Arte Collectum I's works are not intended for immediate exhibition. Nevertheless, the fund ensures that its holdings remain visible and relevant within the art world by strategically leveraging the expertise and connections of its investment committee. Through partnerships with influential institutions, the fund facilitates the inclusion of its works in significant exhibitions and retrospectives. This strategy not only enhances the cultural footprint of the artists but also serves to elevate the market value of the fund's assets. To illustrate, Arte Collectum I routinely collaborates with museums by lending works for high-profile exhibitions, often covering transportation and insurance costs. This arrangement benefits museums, which face tight budgets and high logistical expenses, and simultaneously positions the fund as a key player in the institutional art landscape. However, the opacity of these exchanges—common in the art world—raises questions about the provenance of works,

⁷⁹ Magnus af Petersens, introductions by Jonas Höglund and Lars Nittve, *Arte Collectum I – Other Stories* (Arte Collectum, 2023).

Arte Collectum I is a buy-and-hold fund, meaning its strategy is to have a buying period, a holding period and a selling period after 6 years from the start of the investment, with two years of possible extension due to unforeseen circumstances that would likely negatively impact the returns.

potential conflicts of interest, and the underlying motivations of such partnerships. Public institutions rarely disclose the financial or strategic arrangements behind loaned works, leaving gaps in transparency that complicate the perception of such collaborations.

The Arte Collectum I Collection

My interview with Magnus af Petersens, Arte Collectum I's curator who has previously worked alongside Lars Nittve at Moderna Museet, illuminated certain connections running across the collection. These themes are outlined in the fund's catalogue, *Arte Collectum I: Other Stories* (2023), which imitates an exhibition catalogue in format and structure. Following an introduction by Nittve and a preface by Jonas Höglund, af Petersens introduces each artist through a series of brief essays contextualizing their work within art history. These essays are organized under thematic headings, such as *Postcolonialism*, *Forbidden Desires*, *Rewriting Art History*, and *Modern Weaving and Textiles from the Bauhaus*. A notable characteristic of many artists in the collection is their complex cultural identities; some have lived in exile or migrated across countries, incorporating techniques and influences from diverse traditions into their work.

One such artist is Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian (1922–2019), whose life and work reflect a dynamic interplay between Eastern and Western artistic traditions. Born in Iran, she emigrated to New York in the 1940s, where she immersed herself in the burgeoning art scene, forging connections with artists like Joan Mitchell, Jackson Pollock, and Andy Warhol.⁸⁰ Her time in New York exposed her to the minimalist and abstract expressionist movements, which significantly shaped her practice. However, her return to Iran in 1957 marked a pivotal shift in her work. Drawing inspiration from traditional Persian art and architecture, Farmanfarmaian developed a distinctive style that combined modernist abstraction with Islamic geometric design.⁸¹ Her use of Āina-kāri, the Persian technique of mirror mosaic decoration, transformed this historical craft into a medium for contemporary art.⁸² Works such as *Fourth Family Pentagon* (2013) and *Fourth Family Hexagon* (2013),⁸³

⁸⁰ Donna Stein, "Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian: Empowered by American Art" *Woman's Art Journal* 33.1 (Spring – Summer 2012).

⁸¹ Monir Farmanfarmaian in conversation with Lauren O'Neill Butler; *Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian*, "Art Forum" 2015.

⁸² Stein, "Farmanfarmaian."

⁸³ Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, *Fourth Family Pentagon*, 2013, reverse painted glass, mirrored glass, and plaster, 108 x 124,5 x 33 cm.

Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, *Fourth Family Hexagon*, 2013, reverse painted glass, mirrored glass, and plaster, 117 x 120,7 x 36,8 cm.

af Petersens, *Arte Collectum I – Other Stories*, 72-75.

acquired by Arte Collectum I, exemplify this synthesis of cultural heritage and modernist aesthetics. These pieces, with their intricate reflective surfaces, speak to themes of multiplicity and spiritual transcendence. Farmanfarmaian's career was marked by upheaval; after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, she was exiled from Iran, losing access to her cultural roots until her return in 1992.⁸⁴ The inclusion of her work in *Monir Farmanfarmaian: A Mirror Garden* at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta (November 2022–April 2023) exemplifies the fund's strategy of leveraging institutional exhibitions to strategically promote its holdings' while contributing to elevate Farmanfarmaian as a key figure in global modernist discourse.

Another noteworthy acquisition by Arte Collectum I is the work of Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (b. 1940), a Métis and Shoshone artist whose practice is deeply rooted in her Native American heritage (she is an enrolled member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes) and her commitment to activism. Born on the Flathead Reservation in Montana, Quick-to-See Smith has spent her career as an artist, educator, curator, and advocate for Indigenous representation in the arts.⁸⁵ She uses a wide variety of media, combining collage, different painting and printing techniques in her artworks to criticize Native American representation within the dominant culture in the United States. Quick-to-See Smith's socio-political commentary "juxtaposes stereotypical consumer commodification of Native American cultures with visual reminders of colonization's legacies"⁸⁶ challenging dominant narratives and questioning how Indigenous cultures are commodified and misrepresented within mainstream media and art by use of Native pictographs gathered from found objects. *The Forest (C.S. 1854)* (1990),⁸⁷ one of the works acquired by the Arte Collectum I, exemplifies Quick-to-See Smith's exploration of the abstract of landscapes to "touch on the alienation of the American Indian in modern culture, by acting as a sum of the past and something new altogether."⁸⁸ This piece reflects on the alienation of Native peoples from their ancestral lands and ties the exploitation of natural resources to vaster histories of colonial violence. Through layered imagery and texture, it simultaneously evokes a sense of loss and resilience, transforming the landscape into a site of both memory and critique. Similarly, *Survival Map* (2021),⁸⁹ another of the fund's

⁸⁴ Stein, "Farmanfarmaian."

⁸⁵ af Petersens, *Arte Collectum I – Other Stories*, 136.

⁸⁶ Erin Valentino, "Coyote's ransom," *Third Text*, 11:38 (1997) 29.

⁸⁷ Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, *The Forest (C.S. 1854)*, 1990, mixed media on canvas, 167.6 x 139.7 cm.

⁸⁸ Gregory Galligan, "Jaune Quick-To-See Smith: Racing with the Moon," *Arts Magazine*. 61:5 (1987) 82.

⁸⁹ Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, *Survival Map*, 2021, acrylic, oil, and mixed media collage on canvas, 152.4 x 101.6 cm.

acquisitions, employs a map of the United States as a canvas, overlaid with collaged text such as “NDN humor Causes people to Survive.”⁹⁰ Here, Quick-to-See Smith reclaims cartographic imagery, usually a tool of colonial power, as a vehicle for Indigenous humor and resistance. This piece featured prominently in *Jaune Quick-to-See Smith: Memory Map* at the Whitney Museum (2023),⁹¹ marking a historic moment as the first solo exhibition by a Native American artist at this institution. Quick-to-See Smith’s retrospective at the Whitney was a landmark exhibition, but it also stresses the broader systemic challenges facing Indigenous artists. Her career, spanning over five decades, reflects the persistent barriers to recognition and institutional support for Native American voices.

Perhaps the proudest promotional achievement of this fund’s team (as transpired through my interviews) has to be the inclusion of the fund’s two Wook-kyung Choi paintings⁹² in the show *Action, Gesture, Paint: Women Artists and Global Abstraction 1940-70* (February to May 2023) at Whitechapel Gallery in London.⁹³ This exhibition later traveled to the Fondation Vincent van Gogh in Arles (June to October 2023)⁹⁴ and also visited Kunsthalle Bielefeld (December 2023 - March 2024).⁹⁵ Choi’s life and work reflect a complex interplay of cultural hybridity and marginalization, as well as a resistance to both Eastern and Western artistic orthodoxies. Born in Seoul, South Korea, she pursued a bachelor’s degree in painting at Seoul National University before traveling to the United States to study at the Brooklyn Museum Art School, where she graduated in 1966.⁹⁶ Her years in the U.S. were formative, exposing her to the Abstract Expressionist movement, which deeply influenced her bold and dynamic approach to color and form.⁹⁷ Yet, her work retained a uniquely Korean

⁹⁰ NDN: Native Indian.

⁹¹ *Jaune Quick-to-See Smith: Memory Map*, curated by Laura Phipps and Caitlin Chaisson, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (April 19 – August 13, 2023).

This exhibition traveled to the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth (October 15, 2023 – January 21, 2024).

⁹² Wook-kyung Choi, *Untitled*, 60s, acrylic on canvas, 101 x 86 cm;
Wook-kyung Choi, *Untitled*, 60s, acrylic on canvas, 102 x 137 x 3 cm.
af Petersens, *Arte Collectum I – Other Stories*, 54-57.

⁹³ *Action, Gesture, Paint: Women Artists and Global Abstraction 1940-70*, Whitechapel Gallery, London (February 9 - May 7, 2023).

“Action, Gesture, Paint: Women Artists and Global Abstraction 1940-70,” Whitechapel Gallery website, 2023.

⁹⁴ *Action, Gesture, Paint: Women Artists and Global Abstraction 1940-70*, Fondation Vincent van Gogh, Arles (June, 3 - October 22, 2023).

“Action, Gesture, Paint: Women Artists and Global Abstraction 1940-70,” Fondation Vincent van Gogh Arles website, 2023.

⁹⁵ *Action, Gesture, Paint: Women Artists and Global Abstraction 1940-70*, Kunsthalle Bielefeld, Bielefeld (December 2, 2023 – March 3, 2024).

“Action, Gesture, Paint: Women Artists and Global Abstraction 1940-70,” Kunsthalle Bielefeld website, 2023.

⁹⁶ “Wook-kyung Choi Among Artsy's Women Who Shaped Abstract Expression,” *Cranbrook Academy of Art*. (15 March 2023).

⁹⁷ Kwon Mee-yoo, *Forgotten abstract painter Choi Wook-kyung revisited*, “The Korea Times”, (September 12, 2016).

sensibility, drawing on traditions such as *minhwa* (folk art) and *dancheong* (ornamental multicolor brushwork used in Korean temple painting). This synthesis of Eastern and Western influences created a distinctive visual language that set her apart from her peers. Returning to Korea in 1978, Choi found herself at odds with the prevailing art movements of the time. The minimalist, monochromatic abstraction of *Dansaekhwa* dominated the Korean art scene, while the politically charged, figurative works of the *Minjung Misul* movement rose to prominence.⁹⁸ Choi's expressive and experimental style, which often included text, poetry, and politically charged themes of feminism, pacifism, and anti-racism, positioned her as an outsider in this landscape. Her work was frequently overlooked in her home country, where its fusion of personal and cultural narratives did not align with the dominant artistic trends. Arte Collectum I's acquisition of Choi's works reflects a deliberate effort to elevate her profile within global art history. The inclusion of her paintings in *Action, Gesture, Paint* marked the first time her work was exhibited in the United Kingdom and Germany.⁹⁹ Notably, her paintings were featured on promotional materials for the exhibition's iterations in Europe, bringing her previously under-recognized contributions to Abstract Expressionism into wider public view. This exhibition explored the contributions of women artists to abstraction, often positioning them as challengers to the traditionally male-dominated narrative of gestural painting. Choi's paintings stand out for their vivid palettes, fluid compositions, and integration of personal and cultural symbols, offering a nuanced perspective on the movement. The works acquired by Arte Collectum I incorporate autographic poems and text, reflecting Choi's recurring exploration of displacement and identity. These elements bridge her personal experiences as an artist navigating multiple cultural contexts with deeper political commitments. Her innovative synthesis of styles and themes arguably paved the way for later generations of Korean artists seeking to challenge the dichotomy between global modernism and local traditions. Choi's career was tragically cut short by her untimely death at age 45. Her legacy, managed today by Kukje Gallery in Seoul, remains underappreciated relative to her contributions.¹⁰⁰ Arte Collectum I's inclusion of her work in high-profile exhibitions can be seen as an effort to redress this historical oversight.

However, the fund's involvement also raises questions about how the market-driven mechanisms of art funds intersect with the cultural rehabilitation of marginalized artists. By acquiring these works, Arte Collectum I positions itself within this larger conversation about

⁹⁸ Kate Sutton, "Wook-kyung Choi: Kukje Gallery," *Artforum*, December 2016, 55.

⁹⁹ "Action, Gesture, Paint," Whitechapel Gallery website, 2023.

¹⁰⁰ So Yoon Kim, liaison to the estate of Wook-kyung Choi at Kukje Gallery, e-mail to the author.

equity and representation in the art market. While the increased visibility undoubtedly benefits Choi's posthumous reputation, it also highlights the dependency of the fund's strategy on leveraging institutional partnerships to generate cultural and financial capital. By promoting Choi as a key figure in global Abstract Expressionism, Arte Collectum I contributes to a reevaluation of her position in art history. Yet this process is not without its tensions. The commodification of her narrative as a "rediscovered" artist risks reducing her work to an investment asset, overshadowing the deeply personal and politically engaged nature of her practice. In this context, the fund's acquisitions become entangled with debates about the commodification of activism and the ethical implications of market-driven advocacy. Choi's story, like those of other artists in the fund's collection, exemplifies the opportunities and ethical complexities inherent in the fund's operations.

Theoretical Analysis

These examples illustrate the work carried out by Arte Collectum I to activate its collection, which remains habitually stored in freeports in Stockholm and Delaware, physically removed from the public eye and the cultural spaces that imbue art with meaning. In this context, the curator, af Petersens, assumes the peculiar task of summoning meaning from a setting devoid of immediate cultural resonance. To demonstrate, I shall once again invoke Jean Baudrillard's writings, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1972/1981), and specifically chapters 4 (*Gesture and Signature: Semiurgy in Contemporary Art*) and 5 (*The Art Auction: Sign Exchange and Sumptuary Value*). As elucidates artworks' viability as investment assets rests upon their condensation into sign value, a process in which the signature plays a crucial role. The signature inscribes the artwork within the syntagmatic production of the artist's oeuvre and, more broadly, within the systemic logic of the art market. Seriality and authentication are precisely what lend art to its signification, and "fatally" to the dimension of integration and consumption by collectors.¹⁰¹ To cite Baudrillard directly:

Parallel to the ascension of economic exchange value into sign value, there is a reduction of symbolic value into sign value. On either side, economic exchange value and symbolic value lose their own status and become *satellites* of sign value. At the level of paintings, manipulated supersigns, symbolic value is resolved into an *aesthetic function*, that is, it only operates *inter linea*, behind

¹⁰¹ Baudrillard, *Critique*, 110.

the operation of the sign, as a reference-alibi, as a sublime rationalization of the sumptuary operation.¹⁰²

Baudrillard here is talking about auctions specifically, but these reflections lend themselves to the more complex economic lives that artworks are involved in now, compared to the early 70s, when the original version of *Critique* (1972) was published in France. He posits that, as economic exchange value ascends into sign value, symbolic value is reduced to an aesthetic function, operating as a *reference-alibi* for the sumptuary and semiotic operations of the market. The *economic exchange value* of a piece of art is a straightforward enough notion, even though it might be determined by somewhat aleatory factors, and depending on the artwork's stage in its life as a commodity, its economic value could be latent due to its exclusion from the economic exchange (as is the case for artworks held in most museums' permanent collections, for example)¹⁰³ as is discussed at length by Arjun Appadurai in his essay *Commodities and the politics of value* (1994). *Symbolic value*, on the other hand, is the value assigned to an artwork by virtue of its relation to a subject, be it its former owners (provenance) or maker (artist). This latter value system notably differs from *sign value*, which is the artwork's value in relation to the system of other artworks, this is where signatures become relevant in positioning the artwork within the broader production of the given artist. This process allows artworks to circulate within economic systems where their value is abstracted and instrumentalized. As is the case within Arte Collectum I, but also other art funds more generally, the fund's tactic hinges on this abstraction, where the artworks' sign value, anchors them in their place within the artist's production; and it serves as the foundation for their commodification as financial assets. However, this reliance on sign value creates a paradoxical dynamic. While the fund's artworks are momentarily held in a liminal state, suspended in freeports and removed from active commodity exchange (taken out of the *commodity phases* of their *social lives*) they are periodically reintroduced to cultural contexts such as museums and exhibitions.¹⁰⁴ These settings, where artworks are typically perceived as inalienable treasures of public collections, function as venues where their symbolic and sign values are reinforced. By displaying works alongside those permanently removed from

¹⁰² Ibid., 120.

¹⁰³ Although there is always a possibility of museums deaccessioning, it is not the norm and often badly received by the public.

See: Jin Maeng Kwoung, *Museum Provenance and its Financial Impact: The Analysis of Museums Deaccessioning and the Value of Art*, Master Thesis, Sotheby's Institute of Art, 2018.

¹⁰⁴ Arjun Appadurai, "Commodities and the politics of value," in Susan M. Pearce (ed.) *Interpreting Objects and Collections* (London: Routledge, 1994), 84.

commodification, Arte Collectum I temporarily obscures their status as commodities by leveraging the museum's sanctified spaces where the artworks' sign value is championed (after all, they are the temples of *signification*) to legitimize its holdings and elevate their cultural and economic value context. This is where the fund's holdings' legitimacy is established and their value is sealed in one clean sweep. In this context the artworks' nature as commodities is forgotten by the audiences. Here the curators truly are *masters of the process of signification*, which is the ultimate logic of production and semiotic privilege, according to Baudrillard.¹⁰⁵ In his terms, this is a "necromantic" process in which curators act as intermediaries, reanimating artworks with symbolic value to amplify their exchangeability. It is then the curator's job to reanimate the artwork of its original symbolic value and imbue it with its aura. From the freeport loculi to the museum's sanctuaries, the curators are the necromancers who move the artworks between these parallel planes of realities, they guard the portal and chaperone the artworks through and towards higher planes of economic value. Curation is thus used in this case to canonize artists and their productions, producing the surplus advantage of capital gain.

This dynamic demonstrates the dual nature of the fund's strategy. On the one hand, the promotion of underrepresented artists within major institutions recalibrates the hierarchies of art history, contributing to a more inclusive narrative. Artists like Wook-kyung Choi and Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, long overlooked by canonical frameworks, gain visibility and cultural recognition through these efforts. On the other hand, this process is deeply entangled with the commodification of their work, raising questions about the motivations and implications of such interventions. While the fund's curatorial endeavors may elevate these artists' positions within the art historical canon, they also instrumentalize their narratives for financial gain, highlighting the inextricable link between semiotic privilege and economic exploitation. Baudrillard's assertion that curation serves the ultimate logic of sign production is particularly apt in this context. By positioning itself as both an arbiter of cultural significance and a participant in the financial system, Arte Collectum I exemplifies the ways in which semiotic value is leveraged to generate surplus economic value. The act of canonization: curating exhibitions, promoting works, and strategically aligning with institutional partners becomes a tool for consolidating both cultural and financial capital. This dual exploitation of semiotic systems underscores the fund's reliance on mechanisms that are as much about sustaining its assets' value as they are about advancing marginalized voices.

¹⁰⁵ Baudrillard, *Critique*, 116.

The fund's activities exist within a nuanced landscape, where financial ambitions intersect with social and cultural aspirations. By invoking themes of equity and representation, Arte Collectum I aligns itself with broader movements for social sustainability in the arts. However, its operations also reveal the tensions inherent in using art's semiotic and symbolic systems for economic ends. This chapter argues that while such strategies may recalibrate historical narratives, they are also deeply complicit in perpetuating the very commodification they purport to critique. In this light, Arte Collectum I stands as both a testament to the transformative potential of curatorial practices and a reminder of their limitations when bound to market logic.

3. Salon DAO: We Are All Together the Curator

Turning now to the synthesis of the two models of collective collecting we have examined: Salon DAO is a private art fund governed and operated in a decentralized manner by its investors turned members. While roughly contemporaneous with Arte Collectum I, Salon represents a fundamental departure in both structure and philosophy. It stands as the first decentralized art fund, founded in 2022 by Jordan Huelskamp, Salon leverages blockchain technology to reimagine collective art ownership and curation.¹⁰⁶ Huelskamp, drawing on her experience as Curatorial Lead at Artsy and her involvement with the Young Collectors Council at the Guggenheim Museum, observed untapped potential in web3 technologies to transform audience participation in the art world.¹⁰⁷ Her curiosity for blockchain technologies was piqued by the historic Christie's sale of the first ever NFT, the *Everydays: The First 5,000 Days* (2021) by Beeple in March 2021. At this point, many people started collecting NFTs, crypto art, and some were organizing in DAOs, essentially online communities, based on the blockchain, that aggregated around making financial decisions over what NFTs to collect together. Huelskamp's aim, though, was to apply this technology to the physical art world to create an institution that could foster different interactions between collectors, curators, and artworks, laying the groundwork for a participatory museal landscape that traditional institutions have yet to look towards. Recognizing that institutional change often operates on extended timelines, Huelskamp circumvented existing frameworks by founding her own Decentralized Autonomous Organization, Salon DAO. At its core, Salon operates as a fully horizontal "buyers' club," with all investors forming a voting community. The governance is entirely democratic, with no central executive body. Instead, the acquisitions committee consists of all participating members, who collectively make decisions on purchases and share the ownership of the artworks. These works are stored in members' homes, a further commitment to sharing the collection's stewardship. This structure is radically different from the common buy-and-hold model of other funds like Arte Collectum I, where decisions are managed by a small committee of curators or dealers; the assets are bought during a limited timeframe, stored in freeport facilities until their resale (or in between exhibitions). Salon does not adhere to pre-set expiration dates or sales deadlines, much like a public art institution: it is designed for perpetuity. While financial returns are not its primary objective, any economic gains are considered an ancillary benefit to the fund's

¹⁰⁶ Jordan Huelskamp, "Introducing Salon, the Decentralized Art Fund," *Medium*, August 23, 2022.

¹⁰⁷ "About," jordanhuelskamp.com, 2024.

mission. The main benefit of which, is the safety in knowing that a collector's investment in art is diversified by not only having the one artwork in their home but virtually imagining a slice of the whole collection behind it.¹⁰⁸ By decentralizing governance and embedding artworks into the domestic spaces of its members, Salon redefines the boundaries between collector, curator, and audience. The fund's participatory ethos aligns with its mission to cultivate a community of deeply committed collectors who seek more than financial hedging or speculative opportunities. Instead, these members aim to contribute to Salon's evolving design and to foster a more engaged relationship with the art world, contributing to innovate it.¹⁰⁹ This chapter will explore the implications of Salon's decentralised structure and its reliance on blockchain technologies, interrogating how its model both challenges and reflects broader trends in art and finance.

This fund doesn't buy art with the thought of selling the artworks in the near future, if ever: this investment vehicle was set up in a manner that makes it disadvantageous for its members to sell the artworks in the collection. If somebody wants to see a return from their investment in Salon, they have two options: either every one of its members agrees to dismantle the fund, or the individual member exits the fund by swapping units with a new member who is joining (thus getting their money back and some, according to the most recent valuation).¹¹⁰ Even when the value of the pieces in the Salon collection increases, if the collective decides to deaccession an artwork, that money would go into their shared account and towards another acquisition (or general expenses), it will not be distributed in the investors' digital wallets. This mechanism was designed with the specific goal to prevent future members from taking over and maliciously start selling the collection to reap the investments' value. Moreover, Salon's perpetuity feature is by design (and by the willingness of the investors), but chiefly by virtue of the fact that the DAO did not accept venture capital.¹¹¹ Rather, the buyers' club is recruiting new members by word of mouth, and the result is a steadier, organic growth and a robust community. Ultimately, for the right collector, experiencing this practice collectively is very enticing: often the price of a unit equals what they would spend purchasing an artwork; but instead, for the same expense they get to be part of a community. These collectors have their piece of art at home and they can imagine that

¹⁰⁸ Huelskamp, interview by the author.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Accepting venture capital means that institutional investors contribute larger sums of money and in return they want to see steady growth with set yearly returns, and they might want to replicate the DAO in other iterations too. Thus, the control would have not truly been in the hands of the members.

behind that painting is a vertical slice of the whole collection they share with the buyer's club, effectively diversifying their investment.

DAOs

Before examining the implications and tentative outcomes of a collection where collectors are also curators and owners, it is essential to outline the concept of DAOs, their mechanics, and their potential impact on the fintech space and, by extension, the art world. DAOs, or Decentralized Autonomous Organizations, are “member-owned communities without centralized leadership”; they are governed by the members but managed through algorithms.¹¹² These organisations are fully based on the blockchain, which allows members to vote on investment proposals and executive decisions. The votes are authenticated by the technology they are casted on: embedded on these blockchains are smart contracts that automatically self-execute the pre-programmed commands that enforce agreed-upon rules automatically.¹¹³ This automation is what renders DAOs fully democratic and transparent self-executing computer programs.¹¹⁴ And precisely because the smart contracts eliminate intermediaries, ensuring decisions are tamper-proof and transparent while reducing administrative costs. The transparency and security of blockchain infrastructure make DAOs particularly appealing for collective decision-making, as every transaction or vote is recorded on a public ledger.¹¹⁵ The concept of the DAO can be traced back to the 1990s though it began being called a DAO only in 2013 when they were thought of as a new form of corporate governance.¹¹⁶ The concept gained more theoretical momentum in 2016 after the introduction of the original DAO along with which articulated the potential of decentralized systems to enable transparent, non-hierarchical decision-making structures of algorithmic marvel. This original DAO “was intended as an investor-driven venture capital fund, which would disburse funds based on voting patterns of “investors,” based on proposals that would be submitted by participant “contractors” and vetted by nominated “curators.”¹¹⁷ Over time, more were formulated as alternatives to traditional organizational hierarchies, incorporating

¹¹² Usman W. Chohan, “The Decentralized Autonomous Organization and Governance Issues,” *Regulation of Financial Institutions Journal* (March 19, 2022): 5.

¹¹³ André Guskow Cardoso, *Decentralized Autonomous Organizations – DAOs the convergence of Technology, Law, Governance, and Behavioral Economics*, law.mit.edu, November 21, 2023, .

¹¹⁴ Alexander Savelyev, “Contract Law 2.0: «Smart» Contracts As the Beginning of the End of Classic Contract Law” *Higher School of Economics*, no. WP BRP 71/LAW/2016 (December 14, 2016): 7-8.

¹¹⁵ Although anonymous, they do show a log of what the users’ activities are.

¹¹⁶ Primavera De Filippi, Samer Hassan, “Decentralized Autonomous Organization” *Internet Policy Review*. 10 (2).

¹¹⁷ Chohan, “Decentralized Autonomous Organization,” 5-6.

principles of openness, flat governance, and algorithmic support to streamline operations. So much so that a further extension of the DAO logic into cryptoanarchist principles could see them applied to build a community that doesn't require any human management whatsoever.¹¹⁸

How Salon Implements the DAO System

Salon's DAO structure doesn't go quite as far as anarchism, though it employs this technology where it is additive, to authenticate members' votes on acquisitions and governance decisions thus streamlining the interface through a mobile app or website. Each member's vote is tied to their digital wallet, preventing tampering or fraud and guaranteeing that all decisions are recorded on the blockchain's public ledger. This transparency promotes trust among members and underscores the DAO's commitment to open, democratic practices. Moreover, the automation provided by smart contracts reduces administrative overhead and eliminates the need for intermediaries, allowing the community to focus on its curatorial mission. Despite these advantages, the model is not without challenges. The reliance on consensus and collective input can slow decision-making, particularly as the membership grows. For instance, if Salon were dissolved by its members, the blockchain would automatically redistribute the funds proportionally to investors' ownership units. Importantly, Salon diverges from many DAOs by issuing non-tradable membership units, which cannot be bought or sold on the open market.¹¹⁹ This feature prevents speculative trading and ensures that the community remains composed of vetted, committed members. The fund's leadership recognizes the limitations of the current regulatory landscape around cryptocurrencies in the United States and has adopted a hybrid model that incorporates blockchain technology where beneficial while defaulting to traditional legal structures as a 'wrapping'.¹²⁰ Specifically, Salon is structured like a partnership, a Delaware-based LLC (Limited Liability Company), a solution pioneered by legal scholar Aaron Wright, a professor at Cardozo University, who introduced the legal configuration of wrapping the DAO within an LLC.¹²¹ Wright sought to provide DAO-like groups with a framework for experimentation without running afoul of unclear or hostile crypto regulations.¹²² This legally compliant model was first adopted in the art world by Flamingo DAO, a decentralized group created in 2020 to invest in crypto art and

¹¹⁸ Chohan, "Cryptoanarchism and Cryptocurrencies" (November 27, 2017).

¹¹⁹ Huelskamp, "Introducing Salon."

¹²⁰ Wayne Duggan, Michael Adams "How Does The SEC Regulate Crypto?," *Forbes*, June 30, 2023.

¹²¹ Huelskamp, interview by the author.

¹²² Aaron Wright, "Making DAOs Legal with Aaron Wright from OpenLaw," interview by Diana Chen, YouTube, June 2, 2021.

NFTs.¹²³ Salon, however, takes a different approach, explicitly limiting its acquisitions to physical artworks.¹²⁴ By concentrating on tangible art, Salon aims to create a decentralized collection that resonates with the institutional art world while innovating the governance model of buyers' clubs or museum acquisitions committees through blockchain integration. The implications of this setup for the art world are significant. By decentralizing decision-making and storing artworks in members' homes rather than centralized facilities, Salon challenges conventional notions of art collection and curation. At the same time, its hybrid structure highlights the practical challenges of operating in a regulatory environment that is often at odds with the ideals of decentralization. This duality—embracing blockchain technologies while maintaining established legal frameworks—positions Salon as a case study in navigating the tensions between innovation and institutional compliance. What are the practical implications of placing the decision-making process in the hands of a flat, decentralized community? While Salon is still in its early stages, its structure and processes provide preliminary answers to this question. As of this writing, the cooperative comprises 16 members out of a targeted total of 100 and has built a modest collection of seven artworks, publicly viewable on its website.¹²⁵

The fund's participatory governance model redefines traditional art collection structures by democratizing both the selection and stewardship of its holdings. In Salon, members are actively involved in all stages of the acquisition process. They are encouraged to scout for artworks they deem worthy of inclusion in the collection, initiating discussions with their peers by proposing these works in the group's dedicated chat. This informal stage allows members to share initial impressions and gauge interest before advancing the conversation to a monthly video call, where ideas are debated in greater detail. If a consensus emerges during this call, the artwork is officially proposed through the DAO's platform. At this stage, members use their digital wallets to cast their votes electronically, the voting process is streamlined and verified through blockchain-based smart contracts. Members have a four-day window to cast their votes, and if a majority agrees, the acquisition is finalized by the financial committee, which handles the actual purchase.¹²⁶ Later, because the consortium believes that the collection should be enjoyed, the purchased piece is assigned to a host (the person who suggested the acquisition is given the priority to steward said artwork, if they

¹²³ "Flamingo DAO: An NFT Collective," *Medium*, October 5, 2020.

¹²⁴ Huelskamp, "Introducing Salon."

¹²⁵ "Our Collection," Salon DAO, April 20, 2023.

¹²⁶ Huelskamp, "Introducing Salon."

already have a *Salon* piece then the option trickles down by seniority).¹²⁷ This process illustrates the operational framework of DAOs and their potential to adapt to specific contexts such as art collection. Unlike hierarchical organizations where curatorial decisions are centralized within a small executive team, *Salon* employs a collective decision-making approach. This structure theoretically equalizes power dynamics within the fund by granting all members an equal voice, irrespective of their seniority or financial stake. However, the practical implications of such a model are complex and depend heavily on the engagement and expertise of the members involved. While *Salon* reflects the web3 ethos of decentralization, transparency, and community-driven governance, the effectiveness of these principles in achieving meaningful outcomes within the art world remains an open question which is too soon to answer. However, the implications of this model extend beyond decision-making. Once an artwork is acquired, *Salon* challenges the concept of ownership by assigning the stewardship of it to the individual member who will actually take care of it in their daily life. The member who proposed the acquisition is given priority to host the artwork in their home, provided they do not already possess a *Salon* piece. If they do, the opportunity passes to other members based on their seniority within the collective. This rotational system ensures that the collection is actively engaged with and enjoyed rather than being confined to storage facilities, as is common with other art funds. Further discussions on the notions of stewardship and caretaking, as distinct from ownership, will follow later in this chapter.

Furthermore, the reliance on blockchain technology, while innovative, introduces its own complexities. Members must possess a baseline understanding of digital wallets, smart contracts, and voting platforms, which can present a barrier to entry for less tech-savvy participants. Although *Salon* mitigates this by integrating user-friendly tools and providing onboarding support, the broader implications of relying on web3 infrastructure merit consideration.¹²⁸ As the fund grows, it must navigate the fine line between technological sophistication and accessibility to ensure the level of participation it aims to foster. By placing decision-making power in the hands of its members, *Salon* reimagines the art collection as a truly participatory and democratic institution. Yet, this model also raises critical questions about scalability, expertise, and the long-term sustainability of decentralized governance. These issues, alongside the fund's unique approach to ownership and stewardship, will continue to shape its trajectory as a pioneering experiment in the

¹²⁷ Huelskamp, interview by the author.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

intersection of blockchain technology and the art world. All members agree though, that they are willing to shape the future configuration of the collection together.¹²⁹

While all DAOs are flat and democratic in their decision-making, many still rely on a small group of individuals to guide or coordinate their activities. These individuals, even in non-art-related DAOs, are often referred to as “curators.”¹³⁰ Salon does not formally appoint curators, all members collectively assume curatorial responsibilities, both in the sense of selecting and managing a collection and in the wider context of decentralized governance. Just as the acquisition of artworks is subject to a voting system, the admission of new members to this exclusive buyers’ club also requires collective approval. Prospective members must undergo a screening process and a vote, which typically takes about a week.¹³¹ This structure ensures alignment with the group’s shared values and curatorial goals. Moreover, Salon’s model assumes that its members, as collectors-curators, bring significant knowledge and expertise in the art world. Each individual contributes unique insights into specific artistic movements, historical periods, or individual artists and leverages their personal networks for the benefit of the group. One of the first proposals drafted by the group was a protocol of curatorial standards, defined by Huelskamp in our interview as a sort of algorithm to circumvent the members’ aesthetic preferences and instead focus the collective attention on tangible, objective quantifiable criteria that better direct their judgement towards the investment potential of the artwork in question. After many iterations the cooperative came up with a document that could bridge everyone’s collecting credos. The protocol includes ten key criteria, ranging from an artist’s museum representation to their career trajectory. Members assign points to proposed acquisitions based on these parameters, creating a composite score that serves as a baseline for discussions. There is no minimum score for an artist to be considered for an acquisition, the curatorial criteria is a tool to ascertain if the artist is on the rise or if they have reached a plateau in their growth, which may be signaled by a higher score. Paradoxically, a high score may indicate that an artist is already too well-established to align with Salon’s focus on rising talents.¹³² The system’s flexibility enables members to navigate between investment potential and curatorial vision while cultivating constructive debate.

¹²⁹ Jordan Huelskamp, “Salon’s Jordan Huelskamp on Collecting Art as a Community” podcast interview by Adam Green, ArtTactic, April 25, 2024.

¹³⁰ Chohan, “Decentralized Autonomous Organizations,” 6.

¹³¹ “FAQ” *Salon*, 2023.

¹³² Huelskamp, interview by the author.

It is worth noting that while the DAO's structure allows for equitable participation, its protocols can result in acquisitions taking several weeks, or even months, to finalize. The process begins when a potential acquisition is introduced in the group chat, followed by in-depth discussion during the monthly Zoom call. If consensus emerges, a formal proposal is submitted through the DAO's platform for a four-day voting period, after which the Financial Committee oversees the purchase.¹³³ Though this timeline may appear lengthy compared to the rapid decision-making other collecting subjects can have, it demonstrates the DAO's commitment to collective control and deliberate curation. Interestingly, this extended timeline has not deterred galleries from collaborating with Salon. According to founder Jordan Huelskamp, galleries often treat Salon as they would an institutional collection, willingly reserving works while members deliberate. This level of trust is notable, especially given Salon's relative youth as an organization. It demonstrates that Salon, though unconventional and hybrid, has gained credibility within the art market—a sector that typically prioritizes established hierarchies and credibility.¹³⁴ Galleries may trust Salon in part because its model discourages the practice of “flipping” artworks, or quickly reselling them for profit, a behavior that can negatively impact an artist's career and market stability.¹³⁵

During our conversation, Jordan Huelskamp shared a rare exception to Salon's usual acquisition process, highlighting the importance of adhering to its protocols. On this occasion, a particularly enthusiastic member skipped the informal discussion phase, bypassing the group chat and monthly meeting, and directly submitted a proposal for a work they were eager to acquire. This unorthodox move ultimately led to the first rejection of a proposal in the DAO's history, as the collective, when presented with the idea, voted it down. The incident testifies to both the strength of Salon's decision-making structure and the group's commitment to deliberative, consensus-driven administration. At the following meeting, this incident sparked a debate about whether stricter measures should be implemented to prevent future deviations from the norm. However, the members decided against imposing additional restrictions, emphasizing the importance of trust and flexibility within the group. The episode illustrated the collective's maturity and self-regulation, as well as the evolving “Tao of the DAO,” a term Huelskamp uses to describe the shared wisdom and conscience that emerges through group deliberation.¹³⁶ What ultimately transpired with the rejected proposal further highlights the DAO's adaptability and cohesion. After revisiting the

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Alina Cohen, *Why “Flipping” Art Is so Controversial*, “Artsy” 2020.

¹³⁶ Huelskamp, interview by the author.

artist's work in subsequent discussions, the group collectively agreed on a different piece by the same artist, which they then successfully acquired. On account of this mishap, there was a discussion about restricting the access to proposals that have not been previously brought up with the group, though this was ultimately deemed unnecessary.¹³⁷ The process demonstrates that while the DAO's governance model is inherently democratic, it relies on a shared sense of accountability and respect for institutional norms to function effectively. By requiring members to engage deeply with both the artworks and each other, the DAO cultivates a sense of shared responsibility that is rare in more hierarchical art organizations. However, this approach is not without challenges. The reliance on group consensus can slow decision-making and may occasionally test the patience of members or external collaborators. Nonetheless, the willingness of the co-collectors to reflect on and refine their processes suggests that the DAO is well-positioned to navigate these challenges, fostering a curatorial model that prioritizes thoughtful engagement over expediency.

The Salon DAO Collection

Although the criteria does not include diversity goals, geographical diversification and so forth, the resulting collection reflects a cohesive yet diverse engagement with contemporary abstraction, primarily driven by the collective's shared enthusiasm for women artists working within non-figurative traditions. Many of the acquired works explore themes of materiality, process, and the transcendence of boundaries, whether through painting, sculpture, or conceptual means. The collective of collectors turned curators has now acquired seven works, viewable online on Salon's website.¹³⁸ The abstract paintings in the collection, predominantly by women, create a strong thematic and aesthetic foundation. Sarah Crowner's *Sliced Yellow* (2022) exemplifies this focus on materiality and form, with its sewn canvases bridging painting and craft traditions.¹³⁹ By physically assembling her compositions like mosaics, Crowner not only references mid-20th-century hard-edge abstraction but also redefines it through tactile, architectural processes. Similarly, Yoko Matsumoto's *A Man Standing in Wilderness* (2014) highlights a deep engagement with color and texture, her vibrant greens and dynamic brushwork evoking a cosmic interplay of order and entropy.¹⁴⁰ Matsumoto's approach to abstraction as a spiritual and symbolic exploration complements the luminous

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ "Our Collection," Salon DAO website.

¹³⁹ Sarah Crowner, *Sliced Yellow*, 2022, acrylic on canvas, sewn, Salon DAO Collection.

¹⁴⁰ Yoko Matsumoto, *A Man Standing in Wilderness*, 2014, oil, charcoal and pastel on canvas, Salon DAO Collection.

and transformative qualities of Janaina Tschäpe's *Maiden Dawn* (2022), where the fluidity of water becomes a metaphor for metamorphosis and renewal.¹⁴¹ Collectively, these paintings illustrate the curators' fascination with the ways abstract language can intersect with themes of environment, emotion, and process.

Further expanding on abstraction, Hanna Hur's *Nine* (2022) brings precision and minimalism to the fore, her labor-intensive grid painting invoking the meditative and spiritual legacy of artists like Agnes Martin.¹⁴² By emphasizing repetition and process, Hur's work invites introspection, aligning with the ethos of Salon's collection, which seems to value abstraction as a vehicle for personal and collective reflection. Mika Tajima's *Art d'Ameublement (Buchta Tepliz)* (2022) pushes this introspection into a conceptual realm, with her use of paint particles suspended within transparent acrylic shells. The resulting gradients not only engage the eye but also suggest themes of opacity and isolation, subtly alluding to geographic and emotional landscapes.

While the collection's focus on abstraction is dominant, it is punctuated by works that introduce variation in medium and narrative. Alicja Kwade's *Little Be-Hide* (2021) bridges sculpture and conceptual art, juxtaposing natural and fabricated materials to question perceptions of reality.¹⁴³ The pairing of a boulder and its bronze replica, separated by a two-way mirror, challenges viewers to reconcile notions of authenticity, materiality, and illusion. Similarly, Toshiko Takaezu's *Untitled (Closed Form)* (1985) brings a sculptural dimension to the collection while introducing a historical perspective.¹⁴⁴ Takaezu's closed-form ceramics, with their seamless shapes and meditative presence, embody a philosophy of containment and introspection, offering a counterpoint to the collection's predominantly contemporary works. Oscar Murillo's *Surge (Social Cataracts)* (2023) stands apart both in its authorship and its thematic undertones.¹⁴⁵ As the only male artist represented, Murillo's work introduces a socio-political edge to the collection. His gestural abstraction, rich with layers and textures, reflects concerns about migration, labor, and cultural displacement. While Murillo's *Surge* aligns aesthetically with the abstract language prevalent in the collection, its narrative content broadens Salon's curatorial scope, challenging the group to engage with the intersections of form and social critique. Together, these works illustrate the evolving priorities of Salon's collectors-curators, whose mutual curatorial

¹⁴¹ Janaina Tschäpe, *Maiden Dawn*, 2022, oil and oil stick on canvas, Salon DAO Collection.

¹⁴² Hanna Hur, *Nine*, 2022, acrylic, color pencil and flashe on canvas over panel, Salon DAO Collection.

¹⁴³ Alicja Kwade, *Little Be-Hide*, 2021, granite, patinated bronze, mirror, Salon DAO Collection.

¹⁴⁴ Toshiko Takaezu, *Untitled (Closed Form)*, 1985, glazed stoneware, Salon DAO Collection.

¹⁴⁵ Oscar Murillo, *Surge (Social Cataracts)*, 2023, oil, oil stick, and graphite on canvas and linen, Salon DAO Collection.

excitement appears to gravitate toward abstraction, experimentation, and cultural narratives. Although the criteria guiding acquisitions remain ostensibly neutral regarding diversity and representation, the resulting collection highlights a dynamic range of voices, particularly those of women artists whose works explore the boundaries of abstraction and materiality. This balance of thematic focus and diversity underscores Salon’s innovative approach to collective curation.

The Issues Salon Aims to Address

Shifting focus from the specifics of individual acquisitions, it is essential to consider the philosophy behind Salon’s operations and the implications of its decentralized structure. As articulated in Jordan Huelskamp’s whitepaper *Introducing Salon* (2022), the fund positions itself as a reimagined counterpart to institutional acquisition committees, offering what she describes as “an idealized version of a practice that already exists in the art world.”¹⁴⁶ By removing the bureaucratic oversight and hierarchical constraints that typically govern museum acquisitions, Salon creates a model where decisions are entirely in the hands of its members, answering “to no one but themselves.”¹⁴⁷ This vision not only differentiates Salon from other established frameworks but also situates it as a potential disruptor in traditional museum governance practices. Huelskamp’s vision extends to imagining communities surrounding art institutions directly curating public collections, in a new type of community inclusivity which is far from the status quo. While public museums aim to reflect collective identities, the actual processes behind their acquisitions often fall short of these democratic ideals.¹⁴⁸ When considering participation in established museum contexts, it is crucial to recognize the significant gaps between rhetoric and reality. Katarzyna Jagodzińska’s examination in her article *Museums lobbied by local communities: potential and actual place of the people in participatory museums of local history* (2023) reveals that even museums born from community desire and with a clear participatory model often struggle to move beyond what she terms “declarative” participation.¹⁴⁹ While these institutions might emerge from grassroots initiatives and with strong support from local activists and residents, the momentum generated during their creation frequently diminishes after the museums are formalized. This dynamic reflects a broader tension within cultural institutions, where

¹⁴⁶ Huelskamp, “Introducing Salon.”

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Pearce, “Collecting Reconsidered.”

¹⁴⁹ Katarzyna Jagodzinska, “Museums Lobbied by Local Communities: Potential and Actual Place of the People in Participatory Museums of Local History,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* (29:5, 2023): 468.

involvement is emphasized rhetorically yet it rarely extends to meaningful roles in decision-making processes.¹⁵⁰

In Jagodzińska's analysis, a key obstacle to community participation in the art institutions she examined is the bureaucratic nature of museum management, which often prioritizes efficiency and uniformity over responsiveness to community needs. This rigidity limits the flexibility required for authentic participation, leaving staff with little autonomy to implement innovative or localized practices. Smaller-scale museums may struggle with resource constraints that hinder long-term engagement strategies, while larger museums often focus on attendance numbers and economic considerations, sidelining deeper community involvement. Institutional decisions—such as emphasizing central branding or standard programming—often neglect the unique needs of local audiences, resulting in a disconnect between the museum and its surrounding community. In her article, Jagodzińska concludes that sustainable participation requires management approaches tailored to individual museums, prioritizing flexibility and direct engagement over rigid, top-down hierarchical structures.¹⁵¹

While resource-intensive, the strategies suggested by Jagodzińska are vital for preserving the community-focused ethos museums are often created to embody, offering valuable insights into how decentralized models like Salon's DAO could address these persistent issues. By drawing on such critiques, we can better understand the challenges that Salon's model seeks to address and its potential limitations. While Salon offers a glimpse into how decentralized governance might reimagine art fund operations, it also underscores the need for caution when extrapolating these ideals to more complex institutional frameworks. The comparison with community-driven museum efforts highlights the persistent barriers to truly participatory governance, even in contexts ostensibly designed for inclusivity. Then the question becomes whether similar community engagement issues faced by local museums could be mitigated, or even resolved, through a fully flat DAO model?

The idea of museums curating their collections based on audience input may seem utopian, much like the ideals that drive many blockchain innovations. However, this concept is not without merit, especially when considering the potential of DAOs to democratize decision-making thus allowing for deeper community participation. By utilizing blockchain technology, DAOs could lower barriers to entry for putting in place systems that encourage participation in museum governance. DAOs could decentralize the authority typically held by

¹⁵⁰ Jagodzinska, "Museums," 468.

¹⁵¹ Jagodzinska, "Museums," 482-484.

acquisitions committees and expand it to include voices historically excluded from these conversations and engage them directly in curatorial decisions. This participatory model could be adapted by museums through simplified, user-friendly interfaces that make blockchain technology accessible to a wider audience.¹⁵² The development of which is becoming more and more accessible thanks to speedy technological advancement and the rise of artificial intelligence. For instance, voting on acquisitions could be facilitated through apps that require minimal technical knowledge, with smart contracts ensuring transparency and fairness. Additionally, by decentralizing power, such systems could help museums reflect collective identities more authentically while mitigating institutional biases. Although these changes would require a cultural shift and substantial logistical adjustments, the potential for a more inclusive and representative approach to collection-building is compelling. DAOs demonstrate their versatility not only in operations with larger budgets like Salon but also in smaller arts institutions and grassroots collectives. A pertinent example is the Garden Collective, a Lisbon-based group of cultural organizers originating from Cork, who have been hosting multidisciplinary arts events since 2019.¹⁵³ In 2022, the Collective transitioned to a DAO to enhance their operational efficiency and decision-making processes while remaining firmly rooted in the physical world.¹⁵⁴ By leveraging the ready-made governance platform Astro DAO, Garden Collective minimized the costs associated with implementing a blockchain-based system. Built on the NEAR Protocol—an open-source blockchain platform designed to streamline and support the development of decentralized applications—Astro DAO provided both the technical infrastructure and financial support needed. This enabled Garden Collective to effectively experiment with and incorporate blockchain technology into their operations while maintaining focus on their creative and organizational priorities.¹⁵⁵ This transition allowed the Collective to streamline management across diverse activities, including exhibitions, concerts, and publications. The DAO enables Garden Collective to streamline decision-making processes for exhibitions, concerts, and publications, while also addressing operational challenges such as funding and payments. Since becoming a DAO they have created a record label, published several poetry books, organised art exhibitions, concerts and maintained the interdisciplinary nature of their happenings. This example

¹⁵² Huelskamp, interview by the author.

¹⁵³ Eden Flaherty and Eddie Ivers, “Garden Collective 3.0,” *Soundsdoable / Culture File*, podcast interview by Luke Clancy, part 1, 2022.

“About,” Garden Collective website.

¹⁵⁴ Eden Flaherty and Eddie Ivers, “Garden Collective 3.0,” part 2.

¹⁵⁵ “About,” NEAR website, 2024.

illustrates how web3 technology can support both collective decision-making and financial operations in arts institutions of all scales.¹⁵⁶

As the first decentralized art fund, Salon holds a unique position in the history of art. Its innovative structure raises questions about the potential for DAOs to reimagine the management of cultural organizations. If the institution of Salon does grow into being a big, rich and meaningful collection of contemporary art that represents its time and heritage, then it could be attractive for museums to exhibit, one day. The example set by Salon might even drive museums to adopt DAO systems for their acquisitions committees or boards or “friends of” associations. Or maybe, Salon could become a tastemaker and “help propel an artist’s market, by acting as a vote of confidence in the same way a museum acquisition might”¹⁵⁷ and become “an organization that can help further an artist’s career through each acquisition decision”.¹⁵⁸ As Huelskamp notes:

The possibilities for Salon’s evolution are manifold — and ultimately up to our members to decide. As legal precedent around web3 matures, doors may open for Salon, allowing us to unleash our model at scale. Other ideas include allocating a portion of Salon’s inventory to jumpstart a secondary market gallery, using Salon’s artworks to fuel an art time-share business, or sending the collection to auction and using proceeds to start all over again. Wherever the journey takes us, Salon’s future belongs to its members.¹⁵⁹

This flexible, open-ended approach positions Salon not only as an experimental art fund but also as a potential prototype for how decentralized systems might influence broader institutional practices in the future.

Theoretical Comparison With Arte Collectum I

Let us now compare this case study to the other two by placing it under the same theoretical lens as the previous: Jean Baudrillard’s text *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1972/1981). Salon’s approach diverges significantly from Arte Collectum I’s goals and strategies, particularly concerning the semantic and economic transitions of its collection. In

¹⁵⁶ “The DAO,” Garden Collective website, 2024.

¹⁵⁷ Huelskamp, interview by the author.

¹⁵⁸ Jordan Huelskamp, “How Might a DAO Remake Art Collecting? Salon Is About to Find Out,” interview by Min Chen, *Jing Culture & Crypto*, September 7, 2022.

¹⁵⁹ Huelskamp, “Introducing Salon.”

Arte Collectum I, the curatorial équipe employed a deliberate strategy to inject semiotic value into the collection, thereby enhancing its economic exchange value and its symbolic resonance within the art market and art historical narrative. This process, as Baudrillard theorizes, aligns with the commodification and manipulation of signs to create surplus value within the art economy.¹⁶⁰ By contrast, Salon operates within a fundamentally different paradigm. Salon doesn't aim to accomplish the same kind of semantic transition for its collection as Arte Collectum I does. The artworks are not buried in antiseptic freeports, where they risk being stripped of their sign value and alienated from the system of art. Instead, the DAO's model ensures that these pieces remain embedded within living spaces, engaged within the cultural and personal dimensions of their stewards. Unlike Arte Collectum I, where semiotic value is curated externally and often institutionally, Salon's participatory structure internalizes this process, making the enhancement of sign value a collective and decentralized activity.

Moreover, the DAO's approach reframes the host-artwork relationship by emphasizing the bidirectional link of meaning that exists between individual pieces and the larger collection. As each host temporarily stewards a work within their home, they maintain a conscious awareness of its role within the collective's narrative. This constant contextualization ensures that the sign value of each piece remains intact and vibrant, intimately tied to the hosts' lived experiences and the collective ethos of Salon. In this way, the collection's coherence is preserved not through external curation but through the active participation and mutual investment of its members who are contemporaneously its co-curators. Comparatively analysing the two leads us to a critical distinction: where Arte Collectum I still relies on hierarchical curatorial strategies to elevate its collection within the art market, Salon's rhizomatic and community-driven approach inherently resists such commodification, favoring a model that sustains sign value through shared ownership and lived interaction. This shift in curatorial practice points towards a sweeping transformation in how art collections can be conceived and managed, privileging decentralization and personal engagement over institutional mediation.

Rhizomorphic DAOs

However, I would argue, the point of interest here lies outside the objects' lives as commodities or through their regimes of value and the rapport they have with their environs.

¹⁶⁰ Baudrillard, *Critique*, 112-129.

Instead, the interesting aspect is to be found in the way the network of co-curators established the collection. To this purpose we shall into another theory borrowed from linguistics: that of assemblages. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980/1987), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari advance the conceptual framework of assemblages to rethink the nature of collectivity as multiplicities that are interconnected according to different patterns.¹⁶¹ The authors famously identify three different systems of assemblages: the root, radicle and rhizome. Arborescent roots are binary, biunivocal and organized through a hierarchy of the main tree trunk dividing into branches and twigs and roots and root caps opposite them. Trees are binary by virtue of the clear dichotomy between the above-ground branch and foliage and below-ground systems of roots. Culture and society are pervaded by this kind of organisation, from taxonomy, to books, linguistics, companies etcetera. Deleuze and Guattari though criticize arboreal systems precisely because of their binary logic, which negates their potential of truly representing multiplicity: “in order to arrive at two following a spiritual method it must assume a strong principal unity.”¹⁶² The radicle (or fascicular root) is a system of secondary roots grafted onto a main root stem when said stem has been amputated: “in this supplementary dimension of folding, unity continues its spiritual labor.”¹⁶³ Rhizomes are defined in the negative, by what they are not (arboreal nor fascicular):

The multiple must be made, not by always adding a higher dimension, but rather in the simplest of ways, by dint of sobriety, with the number of dimensions one already has available always $n - 1$ (the only way the one belongs to the multiple: always subtracted). Subtract the unique from the multiplicity to be constituted; write at $n - 1$ dimensions. A system of this kind could be called a rhizome. A rhizome as subterranean stem is absolutely different from roots and radicles. Bulbs and tubers are rhizomes.¹⁶⁴

The theoretical elegance of democracy fully expressed, rhizomes are a system of interconnected equals which allows for a transposition of the concept onto a different modality of conceiving culture.¹⁶⁵ It is different exactly because it disenfranchises itself from

¹⁶¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

Originally published in French: *Mille plateaux* (Les Éditions de Minuit: Paris, 1980)

¹⁶² Ibid., 5.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 6.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 6, emphasis added.

¹⁶⁵ Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Ways of Curating*, (Penguin, 2014). See the link made by Hans Ulrich Obrist between rhizomatic thinking and the poetics of opacity of Edouard Glissant.

the positivistic dreams of progress, linear time, of arboreal hierarchy. Deleuze and Guattari liken it to “Nietzsche's aphorisms shatter the linear unity of knowledge, only to invoke the cyclic unity of the eternal return, present as the nonknown in thought.”¹⁶⁶ While in the next page they continue with a subterranean description: “Rats are rhizomes. Burrows are too, in all of their functions of shelter, supply, movement, evasion, and breakout.”¹⁶⁷ Let us reel it back and examine the characteristics of rhizomes to see how they are applicable to DAOs and the organisation of cultural production and alternative ownership models.

First are the two “principles of *connection* and *heterogeneity*: any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order.”¹⁶⁸ This mirrors quite plainly what DAOs are intended to be: non-hierarchical, heterogeneous networks where all agents are recognised the same voting power as the next. Ideally, this kind of flat collaboration between different agents can foster unconventional cross-disciplinary collaborations (such as what we have seen done by Garden Collective).

Multiplicity is the third principle: “A *multiplicity* has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions”¹⁶⁹ meaning the rhizome exists as a dynamic collection of interconnected nodes rather than a singular, unified entity. It thrives on diversity and redundancy, rejecting the traditional dichotomy of subject and object. Similarly, DAOs embrace a networked existence where each node contributes to the system’s dynamism. These organisations inherently embody multiplicity, as they are constituted by a collective of autonomous participants. In Salon DAO, this allows for the creation of a pluralistic and evolving collection that accounts for each node’s unique curatorial credo to be represented. Each participant’s contribution adds to the richness of the collective decision-making process, ensuring that no single perspective dominates. Looking back on Huelskamp’s observation of being able to imagine a slice of the whole collection beyond each single artwork, even though it was made while speaking to the diversification potential of investing with others; this still proves the multiplicity embedded in every dimension of the DAO.¹⁷⁰ In business this would be called *network effect*, where the addition of a single node increases the value of the whole just by virtue of its existence: all members benefit from the expertise, connections, investment, and advice of the others.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 6.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 8, emphasis added.

¹⁷⁰ Huelskamp, interview by the author.

¹⁷¹ Caroline Banton, “What Is the Network Effect?” Investopedia, 2024.

Another significant feature of the rhizome is its resilience and capacity for reconfiguration, what Deleuze and Guattari term *asignifying rupture*. When disrupted, the rhizome reorganizes itself along new pathways, maintaining continuity through adaptation: “A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines. You can never get rid of ants because they form an animal rhizome that can rebound time and again after most of it has been destroyed.”¹⁷² DAOs similarly demonstrate resilience and adaptability, particularly in their capacity to pivot and evolve in response to external or internal challenges. For example, Salon DAO has embedded within its coding some safeguards that prevent the organisation from imploding, a malicious member from taking over the collection and liquidating it for profit or decisions being made without the pre-set iters. These safeguards were developed through member consensus and demonstrate the ability to reconfigure without dismantling the underlying structure is a testament to the rhizomatic adaptability inherent in DAOs.¹⁷³ All the while, even though Deleuze and Guattari do not define it as a distinct principle, they expand on the notion of *asignifying rupture* by talking about *deterritorialisation* and *reterri-torialisation*.

“How could movements of deterritorialization and processes of reterri-torialization not be relative, always connected, caught up in one another? The orchid deterritorializes by forming an image, a tracing of a wasp; but the wasp reterritorializes on that image. The wasp is nevertheless deterritorialized, becoming a piece in the orchid's reproductive apparatus. But it reterritorializes the orchid by transporting its pollen. Wasp and orchid, as heterogeneous elements, form a rhizome. It could be said that the orchid imitates the wasp, reproducing its image in a signifying fashion (mimesis, mimicry, lure, etc.). But this is true only on the level of the strata—a parallelism between two strata such that a plant organization on one imitates an animal organization on the other. At the same time, something else entirely is going on: not imitation at all but a capture of code, surplus value of code, an increase in valence, a veritable becoming, a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp. Each of these becomings brings about the deterritorialization of one term and the

¹⁷² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 9.

¹⁷³ Huelskamp, interview by the author.

reterritorialization of the other; the two becomings interlink and form relays in a circulation of intensities pushing the deterritorialization ever further.”¹⁷⁴

I believe the cartographical image of orchid and wasp is perhaps even more pertinent than that of a colony of ants or a burrow of rats, as they are systems of equals, to represent instead a heterogeneous group with strong individualities such as that of the DAOs we have seen here. The rhizomatic organisation has the potential not only to provide value in each of the members lives and in the broader environment outside the DAO; but also to permanently modify the curatorial and artistic lives of each component. Even though an orchid is arboreal (since it has roots), it forms part of a rhizome when considered within its relationship to the wasp.¹⁷⁵ I'd posit that DAOs are rhizomes not only in the way they are organised within the institution they constitute, but also form a rhizome with their environment and another rhizomorphic stratus between people and blockchain. *Aparallel evolution*.¹⁷⁶

The next, and last, two principles are of *cartography* and *decalcomania*: Deleuze and Guattari contrast maps, which are dynamic and continually redefined, with tracings, which reproduce static and fixed hierarchies. “Make a map, not a tracing. The orchid does not reproduce the tracing of the wasp; it forms a map with the wasp, in a rhizome. What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real.”¹⁷⁷ The artistic DAOs described in this thesis function as cartographies, mapping out new possibilities for collective administration and experimentation. Rather than replicating the hierarchical models of traditional cultural institutions, DAOs offer living systems that evolve with their participants’ needs and priorities. Garden Collective, a DAO formed by cultural organizers, exemplifies this approach, using decentralized administrative tools to remain responsive to its members' shifting artistic and logistical objectives. Rather than replicating the hierarchical models of museums or galleries, DAOs experiment with participatory frameworks, creating living systems of governance that evolve with member input:

“[The map] is itself a part of the rhizome. The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification.

¹⁷⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 10.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Remy Chauvin, *Entretiens sur la sexualité*, ed. Max Aron, Robert Courrier, and Etienne Wolff (Plon, 1969) 205. As quoted by Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 10.

¹⁷⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 12.

It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation.”¹⁷⁸

When viewed through the lens of assemblages, DAOs can be understood as dynamic systems where individuals and technologies coalesce into adaptive, self-regulating collectives. These assemblages highlight the interplay between human actors, technological protocols, and shared cultural objectives, framing DAOs not merely as administration tools but as evolving cultural phenomena. Their operations involve a continuous negotiation of agency, where the boundaries between human and technical inputs blur, reflecting the fluidity and interconnectedness that rhizomes emphasize. Though the relevance of DAOs extends beyond governance mechanisms: they reimagine the ways in which art collections are built, shared, and engaged with. By doing so, they present an opportunity to align the ownership and management of art more closely with the decentralized, collective, and participatory nature of art-making itself.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

CONCLUSION

The case studies in this thesis each advanced distinct solutions to the shared challenge of collective curation, utilizing curatorial practice as an exploratory methodology. This investigation has delved into the possibilities afforded by collective ownership to engage groups in co-curating a collection of art. Such engagement is informed by Corina Oprea's application of Michel Foucault's critique of institutional structures, particularly in relation to curatorial practices as sites of knowledge production.¹⁷⁹ Through her reading of Foucault's *Power/Knowledge* (1980), *The Care of the Self* (1984), and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1989), Oprea repositions the curatorial from a methodology to a discursive act of crafting collective knowledge. This reframing is particularly useful for analyzing how collective ownership models or cooperative artistic practices reconceptualize the processes by which curatorial authority is distributed and enacted.

For Foucault, knowledge is not a fixed or universal truth but a construct shaped by the discursive practices that produce it. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, he defines knowledge as "that of which one can speak in a discursive practice" and "the space in which the subject may take up a position and speak."¹⁸⁰ Exhibitions and collections, in this view, are not neutral repositories of meaning but are structured by power relations and discourses that influence their construction.¹⁸¹ The production of knowledge is not separate from the exercise of power but is a means through which power operates. Oprea's application of Foucauldian theories is particularly significant in the context of curatorial practices, where decisions about what is displayed, how it is interpreted, and whose narratives are foregrounded are exercises of institutional power.¹⁸² This understanding aligns with the challenges and opportunities inherent in collective curatorial models, where hierarchies are disrupted, allowing for alternative narratives and more pluralistic perspectives. Such is the case with Collection Collective, which positions itself as a counter-institution fostering inclusive and independent practices.¹⁸³ Its dissenting content and commitment to curating contemporary knowledge

¹⁷⁹ Oprea, "End of the Curator."

¹⁸⁰ Michael Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 1989, 182-3.

¹⁸¹ Oprea, "End of the Curator," 79.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, "Collecting Outside the Belly of the Beast," 2018.

reflect the Foucauldian perspective that art can reveal the "invisible" aspects of hegemonic narratives, exposing gaps and exclusions in dominant discourses.¹⁸⁴

Returning to Deleuze and Guattari's theory of rhizomes, the dynamic interplay between Collection Collective and its broader environment exemplifies a rhizomatic model of cultural production. The Collective's manifesto explicitly aims to foster a dialogic relationship with the world, cross-contaminating artistic spaces with its influence while remaining open to being reshaped by external responses.¹⁸⁵ Discourse-as-rhizome. Collection Collective deterritorialises the world, the world reterritorialised the Collective which in turn deterritorialises itself within its world.¹⁸⁶

By contrast, Arte Collectum operates within a more hierarchical framework, where curatorial authority is vested in the fund's governing committee. While less participatory, Arte Collectum nonetheless leverages its curatorial power to recalibrate art historical narratives, particularly by uplifting marginalized voices.¹⁸⁷ Using Baudrillard's theories, this thesis examined how the fund's curatorial practices intersect with the commodification of knowledge, transforming artworks into carriers of semiotic and economic value.¹⁸⁸ This dynamic highlights how discursive power can reinforce institutional hierarchies while simultaneously shaping cultural meaning. Oprea's critique draws attention to how collective curatorship models disrupt this dynamic by fostering more participatory and equitable forms of knowledge production. Through collective curation, knowledge is shared and co-created, reducing its function as a tool of exclusivity and commodification.¹⁸⁹

Salon DAO exemplifies yet another modality of collective ownership, rooted in decentralized decision-making and blockchain technology. Its model of participatory curation reimagines the relationships between curators, audiences, and artworks. As discussed, the DAO governance model introduces a more transparent and democratic curatorial process, aligning with Jacques Rancière's vision of intellectual emancipation. In *The Emancipated Spectator*, Rancière calls for a cultural space that transcends hierarchical divides, enabling

¹⁸⁴ "Art can reveal the obscure, the excluded and what cannot be articulated within a specific field, not by 'showing the invisible, but rather showing the extent to which the invisibility of the visible is invisible.'" Foucault (1972: 219) as cited in Oprea, "End of the Curator," 18.

¹⁸⁵ "Collection Collective," Brief History, 2018

¹⁸⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 11. Drawing a parallel between books and exhibitions both forming a rhizome with the world.

¹⁸⁷ Magnus af Petersens, interview by the author, 2023.

Lars Nittve, interview by the author, 2023.

¹⁸⁸ See above, 40.

¹⁸⁹ Oprea, "End of the Curator," 81-82.

audiences to engage as co-creators of meaning. This participatory framework embodies his vision of spectatorship as an active and equal engagement with cultural production.

In all three cases, the potential of collective ownership to decentralize meaning-making and empower diverse voices emerges as a central theme. Yet, each model also demonstrates the complexities and challenges of enacting such ideals. From Collection Collective's rhizomatic aspirations to Arte Collectum's strategic recalibration of art historical narratives, and Salon DAO's experimental use of blockchain governance, these case studies collectively reimagine the role of the collective curatorial agency of the audience. Together, they suggest that collective ownership is not merely a mechanism for redistribution but a transformative approach to curatorial practice, offering new possibilities for inclusion, dialogue, and intellectual emancipation. Beyond redistribution, collective ownership redefines the very purpose of curation by embedding within it the principles of agency and plurality. This reconceptualization aligns with broader theories that emphasize the importance of active engagement and shared authorship in cultural production. For instance, Boris Groys' essay *Multiple Authorship* demonstrates how curatorial practices can, and in many ways already do, transcend traditional power structures, functioning as platforms for multiple voices to intersect and co-create narratives. This transformation is also inherently political. Collective ownership can reflect a discursive space where marginalized voices are included but empowered to influence the shaping of collective memory and contemporary discourse by challenging hegemonic structures that often gatekeep access to cultural distribution and consumption. This dynamic reshapes the art world into a more participatory and decentralized arena, where the boundary between creator and spectator is deliberately blurred. A boundary that, as Groys argues, is already de-facto indistinct in the reality of artistic production.¹⁹⁰

Finally, these practices transcend the boundaries of art collections, challenging societal hierarchies and advocating for cultural democratization. By redefining the relationship between art, power, and society, collective ownership emerges as a mechanism of resistance and transformation.

¹⁹⁰ Groys, "Multiple Authorship," 93-96.

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