

Dissertation Concerning a Political Economy of Art
With Emphasis on the United States of America

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the relationship between art, the individual, society and the state. The introductory chapter creates a periodization of the arts. We observe the changing nature of the patron of the arts from the Greek *polis* to the market and, during the 1930s specifically, the nation-state in the West, and how the value of art in society has evolved over time. We also depict the co-emergence of the museum as a place of consecration for art, where the private self meets the communal self and social memory.

The second chapter is on the methodology of art economics, specifically how the pre-analytical visions of those practicing cultural economics value art as something beyond exchange-value alone as is found in orthodox economics. The next chapter is a critique of consumption theory and finds that individuals consume too much for comfort and not enough for novelty, novelty (or experience) goods offering the possibility for more lifetime utility of consumption. We observe that museums can reduce the risk of consuming these experience goods, specifically fine art, through education programs for those

whose consumption preference-bundles have yet to include fine art due to the perceived risk of experiencing the unknown.

Next we build a model showing that precognitive aesthetics and the experience of art can change consumption preferences as revealed in exchange. We evaluate the art produced with the US Government as patron in the New Deal 1930s using archival material and find the content of this art was modified by politically-appointed art administrators perhaps with the intent to prevent the viewer (the median voter) from questioning an enlarged role for a discretionary state in the history of the American project.

To conclude we denote our dissertation makes original contributions to a political economy of art but is not a final word on the subject. We examine the concept of a political economy of art itself and find that the meaning of the term “political economy” is dynamic and evolving. Political economy has recently begun to include the nation-state as an endogenous variable. We address this explicitly in our notion of “art statism,” or, art in service to a self-interested state. We also contrast art statism with the concept of cultural nationalism as developed in the dissertation’s periodization of the arts.