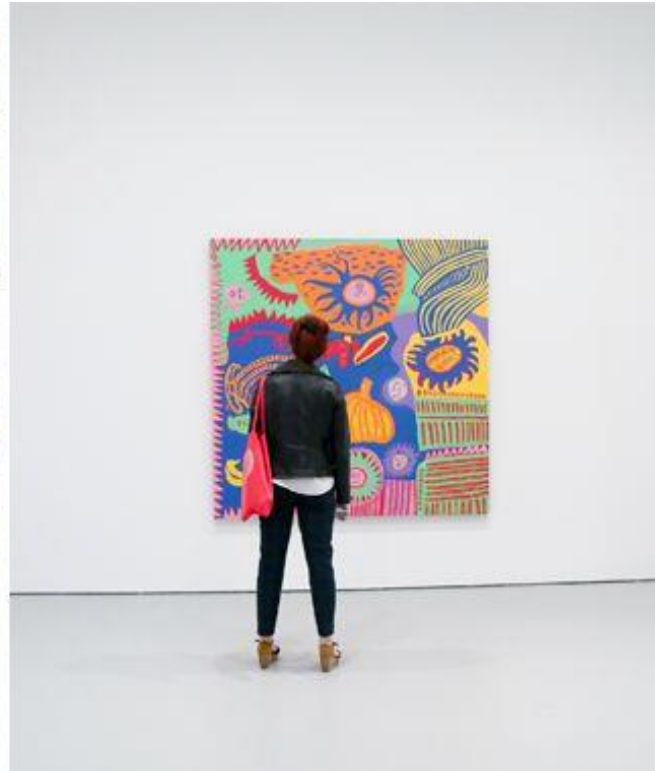


Where Next? Four Art World Predictions for 2014

by Ben Davis

27/12/13 7:29 AM EST



Left, a crowd outside the David Zwirner Gallery waits to see one of Yayoi Kusama's infinity rooms. Right, a lone viewer stands in front of a Kusama painting in the same show. (Courtesy Dylan Schenker via Twitter/Photo by Andrew Toth/Getty Images)

1. MUSEUMS GET MORE IMMERSIVE

Earlier this year, I wrote about the “[Two Cultures of Contemporary Art](#),” how the bubbling enthusiasm for a certain kind of large-scale entertainment-art is masking an [alarming decline in audiences for more traditional types of art](#). (For the record, I like both kinds.) [Yayoi Kusama’s blockbuster end-of-year show at David Zwirner](#) offered an unexpected natural experiment that seems to confirm this divide. The Zwirner website [put it right out there](#): “Please expect long lines to enter the two infinity rooms... There are no lines to view the paintings.” And indeed, the rooms for the paintings were almost empty when I visited, even as [people fought each other](#) to get a selfie in Kusama’s mirrored fantasy bunker.

Museums around the country, desperate to juice attendance, are going to keep pushing away from things-on-the-wall style programming. There will be more immersive environments, more techie stuff in the galleries, and more social media gimcrackery to try to engage young people. Above all, there will be more art that borders on theme-park attractions.

2. THE SILICON VALLEY CHALLENGE IS ON

Not one, but two new art fairs will launch in Silicon Valley in 2014 — [Silicon Valley Contemporary](#) in April and [Art Silicon Valley](#) in October — reflecting the fact that the new tech millionaires [haven't yet decided](#) they need to make the trip to Basel or Miami in anything like the numbers the art world deems proper. This is one art-dealers-wooing-rich-people story that's actually interesting, because it says something about contemporary art's continued cultural relevance.

Titans of industry have traditionally enjoyed being associated with art — it makes them seem dynamic and hip, smart and enlightened. But the tech kingpins, already hailed as visionaries, are rewriting the rules of culture faster than the rest of society can keep up. So what kind of art — if any — are these people up for buying? The gawky experimentalism of the typical tech-art concoction doesn't seem too promising to me, so it will be interesting to see what sticks at these fairs, and what doesn't.

3. MFA BACKLASH REALLY SETS IN

Student debt is a juicy black carbuncle of a political issue that is going to explode sooner or later, because an unsustainable situation by definition will not be sustained forever. You can't go on charging ever-larger numbers of young people ever-higher sums to prepare them for jobs that pay ever-lower salaries and are ever-less secure. The MFA world presents a cartoonishly exaggerated version of this problem, in which graduates are charged particularly exorbitant sums to train them for a career that is not really a career (for any but the luckiest, best-connected few, that is). Artist Coco Fusco's [Modern Painters](#) [article this year](#) about the perils of getting an MFA [seemed to hit a nerve](#).

At the same time, everyone complains about the “over-professionalization” of art, that it all looks like re-processed versions of things that people get taught in school, that it's got no social vitality, that the only community it entertains is its own. In recent years, there has been a tentative flowering of arty alternatives, like the [Bruce](#)

High Quality University, the Public School, and the Alternatives Fair. Now the alternatives are going to get angrier, weirder, more adventurous, and more outspoken — and maybe be taken more seriously.

4. THE ART MARKET DOES NOT ESCAPE THE GRAVITY OF THE NON-ART MARKET

The big selling point of “art as investment” is that it is “[uncorrelated](#)” with other assets. It may increase in value along with “global accumulated wealth” — auctions [broke records](#) this year at more or less the [precise moment](#) that the stock market touched new highs — but it doesn’t seem to lose value when stocks drop suddenly. That seems to be the lesson many have taken from the art market’s phenomenal comeback from the Great Recession: It’s all upside, no downside!

There’s plenty of well founded [skepticism](#) about art as a serious long-term investment out there, too, and the [art fund industry has had a bleak year](#). But people go on [pitching art as a new safe asset](#), like gold, and therefore paradoxically encourage more people to speculate on it. My prediction is simple: What happens in 2014 in the art market depends a lot on what happens in the “real” economy.

And one area is looking especially vulnerable. Art pundits made a lot, in recent years, of the art-market importance of the BRIC nations — a term coined by a Goldman Sachs economist to refer to the fast-growing economies of Brazil, Russia, India, and China. “[The emerging art economy](#)” was the correlate to the “emerging market” investment craze. Well, the Chinese market is [already in quiet turmoil](#), as the larger economy it’s part of, the world’s second largest, [wobbles](#). Let’s see whether the “[fragile five](#)” — a Morgan Stanley coinage referring to 2014’s potential economic crisis spots of Brazil, India, Indonesia, South Africa, and Turkey — also enters the art-market lingo.