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The Art in Contemporary Scholarship: A Narrative Review

Silas Owen Reed [1]*

1. L-Università ta' Malta, Malta.
* Correspondence: silasreed@um.edu.mt

Abstract: Art constitutes a polymorphous object of inquiry that contemporary scholarship examines from a range of disciplinary perspectives, including economics and markets, arts management and cultural policy, philosophy and aesthetics, education, and therapeutic and arts-based practice. This narrative review synthesizes a corpus of forty-one unique scholarly records with abstracts exported from the Web of Science. The corpus was screened to remove false-positive records in which "ART" referred to antiretroviral therapy or adaptive random testing, records lacking abstract text, and one duplicated entry. The resulting corpus is organized into seven thematic streams: art markets and the economics of art; arts management, cultural policy, and philanthropy; art theory and the definitional question; digital, computational, and AI art; art education, audiences, and measurement; art therapy and arts-based practice; and art history, criticism, and institutional mediation. Across these streams, four recurring tensions emerge: definition versus market legitimation, art for art's sake versus art for society, human versus machine creativity, and aesthetic distance versus participatory engagement. The review also identifies several persistent gaps, particularly the limited dialogue between economic and market-oriented research and aesthetic and definitional scholarship, the unresolved conceptual and institutional status of machine-generated art, the scarcity of comparative and longitudinal research designs, and the prevalence of single-region or single-institution case studies. The review concludes that a more integrated research agenda is needed to understand art simultaneously as an economic good, a cultural institution, a conceptual category, and a mode of practical and experiential engagement.

Keywords: art markets; cultural policy; aesthetics; art education; art therapy;

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1. Introduction

Few objects of scholarly inquiry exhibit the disciplinary breadth and conceptual diversity of art. Within contemporary research, art is variously examined as a commodity traded through auction houses, galleries, and art fairs; as an institutional practice mediated by museums, curators, and specialist periodicals; as an object of philosophical and aesthetic inquiry; as a pedagogical resource in schools and universities; and as a therapeutic, critical, and socially engaged medium. This diversity is not simply a consequence of disciplinary differences. Rather, it reflects the inherently hybrid character of art as a phenomenon that is simultaneously economic, cultural, conceptual, institutional, and experiential.

The breadth of these perspectives, however, can also produce fragmentation. Scholarly discussions frequently develop within relatively distinct disciplinary communities, with limited explicit dialogue between, for example, research on the economics and institutional organization of art markets and philosophical scholarship concerned with the definition and ontological status of art. Such separation makes it difficult to determine how economic valuation, institutional recognition, aesthetic judgment, and social participation interact in the construction of artistic meaning and value.

Against this background, the purpose of this review is to map the principal ways in which contemporary scholarship approaches art by synthesizing a defined corpus of published records and their abstracts. Three questions guide the analysis. First, what recurrent thematic streams characterize contemporary research on art? Second, what conceptual or practical tensions recur across these streams and therefore cut across conventional

disciplinary boundaries? Third, what gaps are evident in the existing corpus, and what research directions could contribute to a more integrated understanding of art? The review is intentionally synthetic rather than exhaustive. It treats the assembled corpus as a window into contemporary scholarly conversations about art rather than as a comprehensive representation of the entire literature.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 describes the corpus and analytical approach, including the screening decisions used to define the final set of records. Section 3 presents the thematic synthesis across seven major streams. Section 4 identifies cross-cutting tensions and research gaps emerging from the synthesis. Section 5 concludes by discussing implications for future research.

2. Corpus and Analytical Approach

The source material consists of a Web of Science export in "savedrecs" format containing fifty records with bibliographic information and, in most cases, author-provided abstracts. Accordingly, the corpus was not generated through an original database search conducted for this review. Instead, it represents a pre-assembled set of records supplied as the empirical basis for the analysis. The objective of the review is therefore to synthesize the available material without extending the corpus beyond the records provided.

Two principal screening decisions were applied. First, three records were identified as false-positive "ART" results because the term referred to antiretroviral therapy or adaptive random testing rather than to art. These included Rhein et al. (2018), which examined cryptococcal meningitis following initiation of antiretroviral therapy; Bulstra et al. (2019), which addressed HIV treatment delivery models; and Huang et al. (2023), which examined an adaptive random testing algorithm. Because these studies fall outside the substantive scope of the review, they were excluded. Second, five records contained no abstract text and therefore did not provide sufficient material for synthesis based on abstracts alone: Wu (2017), Elsner (2003), Wang (2013), Cohen and Wyszomirski (2002), and Golsenne (2025). These records were likewise excluded. Following these decisions, the analytical corpus comprised forty-one unique records with substantive abstracts. One duplicated record, Kim (2021), appeared twice in the original export and was counted only once. The final corpus spans 2002–2026 and is drawn predominantly from journals in arts management, aesthetics, cultural sociology, education, and art therapy.

The analysis follows the conventions of a narrative and thematic review. The records were grouped according to recurring substantive concerns, after which each thematic section synthesizes the relevant studies collectively rather than presenting them as isolated summaries. The synthesis is deliberately grounded in the abstracts supplied in the source corpus. No empirical findings, data, or references beyond those contained in the corpus are introduced. This approach also entails an important limitation: the analysis relies on abstracts rather than full-text articles. Consequently, the level of detail available across studies is uneven and is necessarily shaped by the scope and emphasis of the authors' own abstracts.

3. Thematic Synthesis

Taken together, the corpus reveals seven recurring streams of scholarship on art. These streams are presented in an order that moves from the economic and institutional environments in which art is produced, circulated, and valued, through conceptual and technological debates concerning the status of art, and finally to the educational, therapeutic, historical, and institutional practices through which art is encountered and reinterpreted.

3.1 Art Markets and the Economics of Art

The first and relatively well-developed stream conceptualizes art as an economic object and investigates the markets through which artworks are valued, exchanged, and legitimized. A central insight emerging from this literature is that the art market should not be understood merely as a mechanism for facilitating transactions. It also constitutes an institutional arena in which contested judgments about artistic value and status are negotiated and, in some circumstances, effectively resolved.

Tansella (2007), in tracing the historical development of Outsider Art from the emergence of the term in 1972, identifies a fundamental contradiction. Although collectors, historians, dealers, and other participants in the art world have increasingly accepted works that were historically positioned at the margins, specialists continue to lack consensus regarding a universal definition of the category. Tansella (2007) argues that dealers and collectors ultimately provide the setting in which this contradiction is accommodated, enabling Outsider Art to obtain legitimacy and international

recognition. The market therefore assumes an important legitimizing function precisely where conceptual agreement about artistic status remains incomplete.

A substantial part of this literature examines transformations in the institutional organization of art markets. Jones, Booth, and Acker (2016) analyze the expansion of large Australian Aboriginal art fairs and contrast them with conventional gallery-based models. The fairs bring buyers and artists together in regional centers alongside families, managers, curators, commentators, administrators, and politicians. This configuration produces forms of engagement that emphasize the social, cultural, and interpersonal dimensions of art-making, while buyers participate in the consumption of relational goods associated with the context of purchase.

A related body of work considers biennials as market-making and platform-oriented institutions. Pavlovaite and Griesiene (2019) conceptualize the contemporary art biennial as an art platform and show how public-sector biennials in Lithuania and Ireland incorporate strategic features associated with platform models, particularly through the creation and maintenance of relationships within existing networks. Mersmann (2013), meanwhile, attributes an important part of the international emergence of contemporary Asian art to a "biennial effect," using the Gwangju Biennale as a case through which to trace the transformation of a locally and regionally situated event, beginning in 1995, into a globally significant platform for the exhibition, circulation, and marketing of Asian art.

Two additional concerns further extend the economic perspective. The first involves the marketing of art and the use of artistic elements in commercial contexts. Lee and Lee (2017) provide an integrative review of American research on arts marketing and distinguish among the marketing of arts organizations, marketing conducted with artworks and artists, and "marketing from the art world," which takes the uncertainty and fluidity of contemporary art markets as its point of departure. Baumgarth and Wieker (2020) extend research on the art infusion effect—the positive spillover of art on product and brand evaluations—from classical fine art to urban art. Their experimental evidence indicates that street art and graffiti can positively influence product evaluations, with the fit between art and product and lifestyle perceptions identified as additional drivers.

The second concern is the spatial and institutional organization of art markets. Zhang (2019), through a case study of Beijing's 798 Arts District, argues that arts districts participate simultaneously in the urban land market and the art market. Investment by artist communities in the district generates symbolic capital within the art market and may, in turn, contribute to increases in land value. Chernyaeva (2016), in reviewing the Russian art market, similarly emphasizes the gallery as a foundational market institution and distinguishes private commercial galleries, where artworks are treated as art goods, from ordinary forms of trade in which artworks may instead be treated as duplicated sale objects.

Collectively, these studies suggest that the art market is better understood as a value-producing and relationship-based institution than as a neutral clearing mechanism. Whether through the legitimation of Outsider Art, the relational dynamics of art fairs, the platform logic of biennials, the symbolic capital generated by arts districts, or the aesthetic spillover of art into branding and consumption, market institutions participate actively in constructing artistic value. This observation provides an important bridge to the definitional debates considered below.

3.2 Arts Management, Cultural Policy, and Philanthropy

The second stream focuses on the governance, institutional support, and resource structures surrounding artistic activity. Kim (2021), for example, examines the industrialization of the arts in South Korea between 2004 and 2018 and identifies a polarized policy configuration separating the creative arts from cultural industries. The study interprets this separation as an impediment to the development of the arts sector and proposes a reorientation of cultural policy away from a narrowly distributive approach and beyond an industrial policy that treats the arts simply as a subordinate component. Instead, Kim (2021) proposes an "arts industries" approach capable of encompassing nonprofit arts organizations, entrepreneurial arts businesses, and related industries. The underlying argument is that arts policy must accommodate the simultaneous public, cultural, and economic dimensions of artistic activity.

A related issue is the increasing demand for demonstrable evidence of artistic impact. Goodman (2018) observes that arts advocates operate in a political environment in which they face pressure to provide compelling evidence of the effects of arts programs. The study considers how experimentally designed program research can be mobilized in support of advocacy while also highlighting challenges concerning methodological quality, translation of research into advocacy, the costs associated with rigorous evaluation, and competition within the arts sector. This work illustrates the tension between the cultural value of artistic activity and institutional demands for measurable outcomes.

Philanthropy represents a further dimension of arts support. Chen (2023) proposes a "citizen arts philanthropy" (CAP) system based on a cross-disciplinary consideration of arts patronage and philanthropy, ethics, and participatory forms of giving. The proposed system incorporates subsystems concerned with artistic creation, financial and social engagement, and collective activity, each governed by ethical codes. Chen (2023) further conceptualizes CAP as a digital platform through which citizens could participate directly in art selection and creation while assuming more equalized rights and responsibilities.

Taken together, these studies frame the governance of art as a question of institutional design and normative orientation. Three themes recur: integration, through attempts to overcome rigid distinctions between arts and industry; accountability, through demands for systematic evidence of artistic impact; and democratization, through efforts to broaden participation in the financing, selection, and creation of art. These concerns complement the relational and participatory dimensions identified in the literature on art markets.

3.3 Art Theory and the Definitional Question

The third stream is primarily conceptual and returns to one of the most persistent questions in the study of art: what constitutes art, and on what basis can art be distinguished from non-art? The corpus provides little evidence of a settled answer. Instead, it demonstrates the continuing coexistence of institutional, philosophical, sociological, historical, and relational approaches to the definition of art.

Barrett (2021), writing from the perspective of art education, notes that although the institutional definition of art is often treated as dominant within the contemporary art world, other credible and useful definitions remain available. The study consequently advocates maintaining the definitional question as an open pedagogical and intellectual problem. Vabalaite (2014) similarly argues that a distinctive feature of twentieth-century art lies in the tendency of artworks to respond reflexively to questions concerning the nature of art itself. Questions about the substantial features of artworks, their distinction from non-artistic reality, and the conditions under which an object constitutes a work of art therefore become part of the artistic practice itself. Contemporary works in biotechnological, social, and participatory forms can consequently be understood partly as investigations into the status of the art object and the role of the artist.

Collenberg-Plotnikov (2015), drawing on Clement Greenberg and Arnold Gehlen, identifies a related phenomenon as dislimitation (Entgrenzung). From this perspective, modern art repeatedly operates at its own boundaries by combining forms and crossing established distinctions. Such processes make it increasingly difficult to establish an external criterion capable of determining with certainty whether a particular object is a work of art. Nevertheless, Collenberg-Plotnikov (2015) maintains that theoretical inquiry into the definition of art remains necessary and that art continues to constitute a cultural factor sui generis. The resulting tension is therefore not simply between definability and indefinability, but between the apparent impossibility of a definitive criterion and the continuing necessity of theoretical definition.

Feng (2021) approaches Arthur Danto's philosophy of art through a Zen perspective, engaging with Danto's methodology of indiscernibility and his thesis concerning the end of art. From an East Asian interpretive perspective, Feng (2021) suggests that "art after the end of art" need not be restricted to conceptual art and may instead be understood through the notion of the art of living, thereby opening alternative narratives concerning what art can become. Distaso (2017), by contrast, revisits Benjamin's analysis of pure art and the slogan art pour l'art in relation to the decline of the auratic under conditions of technical reproducibility. The study situates the historical avant-garde, Dadaism, and Surrealism within debates over the use of the concept of pure art, including its appropriation in fascist contexts.

Boundary-making between art and non-art also appears in more embodied and relational terms. Yodanis (2024) proposes physical distance between an object and the body as a criterion through which a craft object may become an art object. According to this account, art objects are maintained at a distance from most bodies, and this distance is institutionally sustained and used by the art world to regulate access to objects. Jewelry provides a particularly revealing case because its necessary proximity to the body complicates its transition from craft to art.

Finally, de la Fuente (2007) situates definitional questions within the "new sociology of art," demonstrating how questions about aesthetic properties can be addressed in ways compatible with social constructionism and thereby reintegrated into social-scientific approaches to the arts. Müller-Jentsch (2013) similarly emphasizes the social conditions underlying the emergence of art criticism in eighteenth-century France, identifying five relevant preconditions: the institutionalization of art, the formation of art markets, the emergence of professional critics, the development of suitable

publication media, and the existence of an interested public. The study then traces the subsequent development, prominence, and contemporary crisis of the genre.

The definitional stream is therefore characterized not by a single accepted answer but by competing strategies for addressing an enduring conceptual problem. Institutional, sociological, philosophical, historical, and embodied approaches each identify different mechanisms through which objects and practices acquire artistic status. The instability of the definition is especially consequential when considered alongside the market literature, because markets may function as practical mechanisms of legitimation precisely where theoretical consensus remains incomplete.

3.4 Digital, Computational, and AI Art

The fourth stream concerns art created through or with digital and computational technologies. Across the literature, a central issue is the location of creativity and the implications of machine involvement for the status of the resulting work. Boden and Edmonds (2009) distinguish major categories of generative and computer art and ask whether the appropriate aesthetic criteria and the locus of creativity should be understood in the same way across these categories. Edmonds and Franco (2017) situate these questions historically through an interview with Ernest Edmonds concerning Systems art, Systems theory, and his relationships with artists including Malcolm Hughes, Kenneth Martin, and Edward Ihnatowicz.

The emergence of increasingly autonomous computational systems has intensified these debates. Beltrán (2020) argues that Generative Adversarial Networks, which can operate with relatively limited direct human intervention, renew the longstanding question of whether machines are capable of creating art. Drawing on Dickie's distinction between natural-kind and cultural-kind theories of art and Searle's concept of status-function, Beltrán (2020) argues that computer-generated art cannot simply be excluded from the domain of art and that a natural-kind theory provides a basis for understanding computer-generated artistic phenomena. The study consequently strengthens the argument that machines can participate in artistic creation.

Tao (2022) offers a more qualified philosophical account. The study distinguishes between symbolic and connectionist technical approaches and identifies three levels of human–machine relations: humans using machines, humans guiding machines, and human–machine separation. From this perspective, AI art occupies an intermediate position between natural beauty and human art. It is neither a natural aesthetic object nor equivalent to traditional human art because AI lacks intentionality and consciousness. Nevertheless, AI can participate in the construction of artistic logic and can be treated as an agent within the actor network through which art is generated. Tao (2022) therefore characterizes AI art as an instance of technological integration whose relationship with art requires further harmonization under the guidance of aesthetic reasoning.

The literature also addresses the institutional recognition of technology-oriented art. Zarina (2023) examines the thematic scope of media art through the major specialized festivals Ars Electronica, SIGGRAPH, and the RIXC Art Science Festival over the period 2006–2021. The study shows that these festivals articulate distinctive thematic agendas through their calls for submissions while also creating spaces in which the still "pending recognition" of media art within mainstream contemporary art can be debated. Digital and AI art thus constitute not only a technological challenge to conventional understandings of creativity but also an institutional challenge concerning recognition, classification, and legitimacy.

3.5 Art Education, Audiences, and Measurement

The fifth stream examines the ways in which art is taught, learned, experienced, and measured. A significant portion of this literature is pedagogical. Bakhir, Zhou, Shu, and Zhou (2025) report a quasi-experimental study of a one-month digital-games-based arts education course involving forty participants. The study finds that game-based arts education enhanced art knowledge—including knowledge of art history, production, aesthetics, and criticism—as well as interest in art relative to traditional instruction. The study addresses an empirical gap in research on visual arts education within game-based learning environments.

Kardum, Kuscevic, and Brajcic (2020) report a school-year educational experiment involving two hundred primary-school students and compare three approaches: observation of twentieth-century artworks, introduction of artworks through a puppet, and students' own art activities. The findings indicate that the mode of art education is consequential for students' preferences concerning twentieth-century art movements. Each intervention broadened acceptance of twentieth-century art, although the effects on preferences for classical art were more limited.

Arts integration constitutes another important concern. May and Robinson (2016), surveying fifty arts specialists participating in a statewide arts-integration initiative in Utah, find that most respondents perceive arts integration as beneficial to both arts and non-arts subjects. At the same time, teacher collaboration is identified as both essential and challenging, while additional training for preservice specialists is also considered necessary. Reported benefits include positive academic and social effects on students, whereas constraints include limited time, difficulties associated with teaching art for its own sake, and insufficient institutional support.

The stream also incorporates increasingly systematic approaches to measurement. Specker et al. (2020) develop the Vienna Art Interest and Art Knowledge Questionnaire (VAIAK) through a three-stage validation process involving lay participants, art history students, and art professionals, followed by a large-scale study of more than six hundred participants. The findings provide evidence for the reliability and validity of the instrument as a measure of both art interest and art knowledge while also clarifying that these constitute distinguishable dimensions.

Overall, this stream indicates that art pedagogy is becoming increasingly diverse in its methods, encompassing digital games, puppet-based instruction, activity-based learning, and integrated approaches. At the same time, evaluation is becoming more evidence-oriented. Validated instruments such as VAIAK provide a foundation for more systematic investigation of audiences and learners, although the broader literature remains heterogeneous in methodological scale and design.

3.6 Art Therapy and Arts-Based Practice

The sixth stream conceptualizes art as a therapeutic, reflective, and critically engaged practice. One prominent theme concerns the relationship between art-making and professional identity. Phang (2026) argues that art-making provides art therapists with an important means of intentionally reflecting upon and participating in the lifelong formation of professional identity. Drawing on art-making undertaken during doctoral education, the study describes a reconceptualization of "becoming" from a linear process to a cyclical one and calls on art therapists to incorporate art-making into ethical professional practice.

Jue and Ha (2021) provide empirical evidence concerning related processes by surveying 202 South Korean art therapy graduate students with a newly developed Art Practice Scale. The scale identifies two dimensions—art competency and attitude toward artwork—and the study reports positive interrelationships among art practice, professional identity, and career commitment. Art practice and the period of study are associated with career commitment, while art practice and age are associated with professional identity.

A second theme concerns the measurement of the therapeutic relationship. Or and Zilcha-Mano (2019) develop and validate the Art Therapy Working Alliance Inventory on the basis of Bordin's conception of the working alliance. The instrument captures the client's relationship with the art medium in the presence of the art therapist. Exploratory factor analyses across two studies identify three dimensions: perceiving the art medium as an effective therapeutic tool, the affective and exploratory experience associated with art-making, and acceptance of the therapist's interventions through the medium. These dimensions are associated with components of the broader working alliance.

Johnson (2022) considers the relationship between art therapy and art itself, drawing on the emergence of art therapy within a Western context. The study identifies differences between art and art therapy in the role assigned to imagination, as well as in the functions of the audience and conceptual rationale. These distinctions emphasize that the therapeutic use of art cannot simply be equated with art as an autonomous aesthetic practice.

A third theme extends arts-based practice beyond clinical settings into research and critical inquiry. Pinna-Perez and Frank (2018) use an arts-based case study of performance art as psychosocial commentary to examine how performance art within expressive arts therapy can illuminate psychosocial proximity to and complicity in dehumanization and structural racism. They argue that performance art can function as a catalyst for psychosocial transformation. Archibald, Caine, and Scott (2017) investigate the intersection between artistic practice and nursing knowledge by distinguishing between "knowing about" phenomena through art-viewing and "knowing through" embodied experience through art-making. Their analysis highlights the capacity of the arts to enhance research and communication, democratize research spaces, challenge representational assumptions, and facilitate education, dissemination, and reflexivity.

Taken together, these studies position art-making as a potentially transformative and identity-forming practice whose therapeutic, educational, and critical functions are increasingly subject to formal measurement and methodological reflection. This stream therefore expands the study of art beyond objects and markets toward processes of embodied participation and knowledge production.

3.7 Art History, Criticism, and Institutional Mediation

The seventh stream focuses on the historical and institutional processes through which art acquires status, visibility, and meaning. A recurring concern is the changing role of institutions and the agents who mediate artistic production. De Vlieghere (2021) examines Alfred H. Barr's 1936 exhibition Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism at MoMA, which represented an important moment in the institutional entrance of outsider art into a major center of the art world. The study shows that the inclusion of outsider art coincided with Barr's changing role from custodian of fine arts to exhibition author with creative agency. This inclusive orientation was subsequently replaced by a more hierarchical approach that demanded the exclusion of outsider art.

Allen (2016) examines the historical role of art periodicals in art worlds through the cases of Artforum and October in the North American art world of the 1960s and 1970s. The study argues that the material and distributive form of periodicals influences the politics of art criticism, with art magazines operating as sites of critical publicity that mediate relationships among publics and counterpublics. Institutions of criticism thus participate not only in the dissemination of artistic ideas but also in the organization of the social field in which art acquires significance.

Transnational circulation represents a second major theme. Nae (2024) analyzes the emergence of critical concepts associated with adaptations of Pop art and conceptual art in Romanian graphic art during the 1970s. Focusing on Ion Bitzan and Wanda Mihuleac, the study examines how experimental practices were adapted for different audiences through state-supported exhibitions, including the Romanian Pavilions in Venice and the Ljubljana Graphic Arts Biennale. Rather than sustaining a rigid distinction between official and unofficial art under socialism, Nae (2024) proposes a "constellational" interpretation that understands these practices as modernisms in translation.

Craft and media history constitute a third theme. Akay and Aydin (2025) systematically assess the influence of the Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau, and Art Deco movements on glass art, highlighting craftsmanship-centered and nature-derived design, organic flowing-line aesthetics, and modern geometric forms employing luxurious materials. The study also considers how contemporary glass production reinterprets this historical heritage through expanded educational opportunities and accessible digital technologies. Persson (2025) examines Bronze Age (1955), a post-war art film concerning Swedish rock art that subsequently became the basis for a new exhibition at the Vitlycke Museum. The study considers the film's formal characteristics and its contribution to visualizing rock art.

This stream consequently demonstrates that artistic status and meaning are continually produced and reproduced through institutions such as museums, curators, periodicals, exhibitions, and films, as well as through historical and transnational circulation. It therefore complements the market literature's emphasis on the production of economic value with an account of the institutional production and mediation of cultural meaning.

4. Discussion: Cross-Cutting Tensions and Research Gaps

When considered as an integrated corpus, the seven thematic streams are connected by four recurring tensions. These tensions are rarely addressed explicitly across individual studies, yet they become visible when the literature is read comparatively. The first concerns the relationship between definition and legitimation. The definitional literature demonstrates that agreement about what constitutes art remains elusive, whether the problem is approached through dislimitation (Collenberg-Plotnikov, 2015), institutional and alternative definitions (Barrett, 2021), or the craft–art boundary articulated through bodily distance (Yodanis, 2024). The market literature, by contrast, indicates that markets may function as de facto mechanisms for determining artistic value and recognition, particularly in the case of Outsider Art (Tansella, 2007). These perspectives raise a broader question: when market processes assign value in circumstances where conceptual definition remains contested, the study of artistic value and the study of artistic status become analytically interconnected. Yet the two bodies of scholarship in the corpus are largely developed independently.

The second tension is between art for art's sake and art for society. Several studies emphasize the social, ethical, institutional, and policy functions of art. These include the arts-industries approach to cultural policy (Kim, 2021), citizen arts philanthropy (Chen, 2023), community-based artistic interventions in Mainland China that combine cultural governance with collective experimental production (Li, Wang, Wu, & Zhong, 2021), and the ethical argument that forms of "cruel art" involving harm to non-human animals ought to be avoided (Coetser, 2020). At the same time, other contributions preserve the importance of artistic autonomy and art pursued for its own sake. May and Robinson (2016), for example, identify the difficulty of "teaching art for the sake of art" within arts-integration models. The corpus does not resolve this tension; rather, it demonstrates that instrumental, social, ethical, and autonomous conceptions of art continue to coexist.

The third tension concerns human and machine creativity. Research on digital and AI art directly addresses whether machines can create art. Beltrán (2020) uses a natural-kind account to support the inclusion of computer-generated art within the domain of art, whereas Tao (2022) emphasizes the absence of intentionality and consciousness in AI while nevertheless recognizing AI as an agent within artistic generation. The question is therefore not entirely new: it represents a technologically intensified version of the longstanding problem of defining art and locating creativity. The institutional dimension remains unresolved as well, as reflected in Zarina's (2023) discussion of the still-pending recognition of technology-oriented media art within mainstream contemporary art.

The fourth tension is between aesthetic distance and participatory engagement. Yodanis (2024) proposes distance from the body as a condition through which an object can acquire artistic status. Other studies, however, emphasize practices that deliberately reduce or eliminate such distance. Aboriginal art fairs encourage relational forms of consumption and interaction (Jones et al., 2016); community-based artistic interventions in China emphasize collective participation (Li et al., 2021); and arts-based research can democratize research spaces by incorporating embodied forms of knowledge (Archibald et al., 2017). The corpus thus accommodates both an account in which distance contributes to the constitution of art and an account in which proximity and participation are central to its contemporary social relevance.

Four principal research gaps emerge from this synthesis. First, economic and market-oriented research has limited interaction with aesthetic and definitional scholarship, despite the fact that market processes may perform functions directly relevant to questions of artistic status and value. Greater dialogue between these literatures could clarify how conceptual categories, institutional recognition, and economic valuation interact. Second, the status of machine-generated and AI art remains conceptually and institutionally unsettled. The corpus contains divergent positions rather than a convergent theoretical framework, suggesting the need for further work on intentionality, agency, authorship, creativity, and institutional recognition.

Third, measurement within the study of art is developing, as illustrated by VAIAK for art interest and knowledge (Specker et al., 2020) and the Art Therapy Working Alliance Inventory for therapeutic relationships (Or & Zilcha-Mano, 2019), but empirical research in education and therapy remains uneven in methodological scale and replicability. Future studies could benefit from larger samples, longitudinal designs, and more systematic validation across cultural contexts. Fourth, a substantial proportion of the corpus relies on single-region or single-institution case studies, including studies of South Korea, Beijing, Utah, the Russian art market, Romanian graphic art, and Swedish rock art. Comparative and longitudinal designs remain comparatively scarce and would allow researchers to distinguish context-specific patterns from more general processes.

Finally, the review itself is constrained by its reliance on abstracts rather than full texts. Abstract-based synthesis makes it possible to identify broad thematic patterns across a heterogeneous corpus, but it limits the depth with which theoretical arguments, methodological choices, empirical evidence, and disagreements among studies can be examined.

5. Conclusion

This narrative review has organized a multidisciplinary corpus of contemporary scholarship on art into seven interconnected streams: art markets and economics; arts management and cultural policy; theory and aesthetics; digital and AI art; education and measurement; art therapy and arts-based practice; and art history, criticism, and institutional mediation. Although these streams have largely developed within distinct disciplinary conversations, their convergence around four recurring tensions is evident: definition versus market legitimation, art for art's sake versus art for society, human versus machine creativity, and aesthetic distance versus participatory engagement.

Taken as a whole, the corpus supports an understanding of art as a hybrid object that cannot be adequately reduced to any single disciplinary category. Art can simultaneously function as an economic good, a cultural institution, a contested conceptual category, and a practical medium through which individuals and communities experience, communicate, learn, reflect, and participate. This multidimensionality is precisely what makes art a productive object of interdisciplinary research, but it also creates a need for greater conceptual integration across scholarly traditions.

The principal implication is therefore the value of a more integrated research agenda. Studies that conceptualize the art market as a mechanism of legitimation could be brought into closer dialogue with research on the definition of art, particularly where market recognition compensates for conceptual uncertainty. Similarly, research on the social, educational, and therapeutic functions of art could be examined alongside theories emphasizing aesthetic distance, autonomy, and the distinctive status of art. The contemporary debate over machine-generated art should likewise be

understood as a technologically renewed form of one of the field's oldest questions: what makes something art, and where does artistic agency reside?

Future research would benefit from comparative, longitudinal, and multi-method designs, as well as stronger dialogue among economic, aesthetic, institutional, educational, and practice-based approaches. Such integration could move the field beyond parallel disciplinary conversations toward a more coherent account of art as an object that is simultaneously economic and cultural, institutional and experiential, historical and technologically evolving.

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