

International Conference

Historicizing Global Contemporary Art Markets: Trajectories, Infrastructures, and Regimes of Value

Lisbon, Tuesday, November 10th, 2026

University of Lisbon – School of Arts and Humanities

Over the last twenty-five years, the contemporary art market has undergone profound transformations that have reshaped its geographies, actors, infrastructures, and systems of value. Since the early 2000s, the accelerated globalization of art markets has challenged long-standing Euro-American dominance while reconfiguring the relationship between cultural legitimacy and economic power. The spectacular rise of the Chinese art market, particularly after the 2008 financial crisis, repositioned China as a central node in the global circulation of contemporary art, while other regions and artistic scenes, including Brazil, India, parts of Africa, and the Middle East, gained unprecedented visibility within international market structures. At the same time, artists historically marginalized within dominant art-historical narratives – including women artists, Black artists, Indigenous artists, diasporic artists, queer artists, and artists from the Global South – have increasingly entered major museum collections, biennials, galleries, auction houses, and art fairs, often accompanied by dramatic rises in market valuation.

These shifts have occurred alongside another major transformation: the growing dominance of contemporary art itself within the broader art market. Whereas Old Masters, Impressionism/Post-Impressionism, and Modern art long occupied the highest symbolic and economic positions, contemporary art has progressively become the most dynamic and speculative segment of the market, accounting for an ever-larger proportion of auction turnover, gallery representation, institutional programming, and collector attention. The expansion of art fairs, global biennials, private museums, art investment funds, online platforms, and transnational gallery networks has further intensified the circulation and financialization of contemporary art.

Equally significant has been the transformation of the figures understood to hold power within the art world. A comparison between the early 2000s editions of *ARTnews*'s "Power 100" and those published in 2025 reveals striking changes in the profiles of influential actors. While the early 2000s lists were heavily dominated by Western collectors, blue-chip gallerists, museum directors, and auction-house executives centred in New York, London, and a few European capitals, more recent editions reflect a more geographically dispersed and structurally diversified art world. Curators, philosophers, thinkers, artist collectives, art activists, patrons, artists, philanthropists, and figures connected to emerging art centres increasingly shape the infrastructures of visibility and value production. At the same time, however, concentration and inequality remain defining features of the market, particularly through the consolidation of mega-galleries, the expansion of billionaire collecting, and

the increasing entanglement between art, finance, luxury industries, and digital capitalism.

Other developments have likewise reshaped the contemporary art market: the impact of the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic on market structures; the proliferation of NFTs and blockchain-based speculation; the growing importance of philanthrocapitalism and private museums; renewed debates on restitution, decolonization, and institutional critique; and increasing attention to sustainability, labour precarity, and the political economy of artistic production.

This conference seeks to historicize these transformations and critically examine the infrastructures through which contemporary art circulates, acquires legitimacy, and accumulates value. We invite scholars to reflect on the trajectories of contemporary art markets since the late twentieth century and the mechanisms through which artistic products become integrated into systems of cultural and economic valuation. How are categories such as artistic quality, significance, innovation, taste, and investment potential constructed, negotiated, and transformed? Through which processes do artworks move from local production contexts into transnational circuits of validation and commodification? How do symbolic and economic values intersect, reinforce, or contradict one another?

This conference also aims to interrogate the narrative of diversification and globalization that increasingly defines contemporary art discourse. Has the contemporary art market genuinely moved beyond its historical domination by white male actors from the Global North, or have structures of inequality merely been reconfigured under new conditions of inclusion and visibility? To what extent do the increased presence and valuation of women artists, Black artists, Indigenous artists, and artists from non-Western regions represent substantive structural change rather than market adaptation to new forms of demand and consumption? How do processes of canon formation, institutional recognition, and speculative investment continue to reproduce asymmetries of power even within apparently globalized and pluralized art worlds?

We welcome contributions that examine contemporary art markets from the late twentieth century to the present, with particular attention to the accelerated transformations of the twenty-first century. Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Globalization and regionalization of contemporary art markets
- Emerging art centres and new collecting geographies
- Women artists, Black artists, Indigenous artists, and market visibility
- Art fairs, biennials, and transnational infrastructures
- Auction houses, galleries, and new intermediaries
- Museums, philanthropy, and private collecting
- Rankings, reputation systems, and symbolic power
- Financialization, speculation, and investment logics
- Digital markets, NFTs, and platform capitalism
- Decolonization, restitution, and institutional critique

- Labour, precarity, and inequalities in the art world
- Contemporary art and the luxury economy
- Data, analytics, and market transparency
- Alternative economies and resistant artistic practices
- Infrastructures of validation, circulation, and artistic legitimation
- Art criticism, media, and the production of visibility
- Art-historical knowledge, provenance, expertise, and the construction of market value

The conference encourages interdisciplinary and historically grounded approaches capable of connecting economic analysis, institutional history, sociology of culture, critical theory, art history, and political economy. The conference particularly welcomes transnational, comparative, archival, digital-humanities, and data-driven approaches to the study of contemporary art markets. By examining both trajectories and infrastructures, the event aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how contemporary art markets operate, whom they benefit, and how they shape the cultural imaginaries of the twenty-first century.

Submission Procedure

Interested authors should submit a proposed title and an abstract of 200-400 words summarizing their intended contribution, along with a short CV (1 page maximum), through the form: <https://forms.gle/j5bJWMzg9tc2LmFk8>

For any doubts, please contact to one of the organizers:

- luis.afonso@edu.ulisboa.pt
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- Institutional contact: artis@letras.ulisboa.pt

Abstracts will be reviewed by the organizers and the Scientific Committee.

Deadline for Abstract Submission: 31/07/2026

Notification of Acceptance: 31/08/2026

Organizers

Luís U. Afonso (Univ. Lisbon)

Cristielen R. Marques (Univ. Lisbon / Univ. São Paulo)

Scientific Committee

Adriana Turpin (IESA-Paris)

Allan Madden (Univ. Glasgow)

Filip Vermeulen (Erasmus Univ. Rotterdam)

Bibliographic Resources

- Adeyemi, J., 2022. *Contemporary Art from Nigeria in the Global Markets: Trending in the Margins*, Cham, Palgrave.
- Duarte, A., Pérez-Ibañez, M. (eds.), 2023. *The Art Market and the Global South*, Leiden, Brill.
- Glauser, A., et al. (eds.), 2020. *The Sociology of Arts and Markets: New Developments and Persistent Patterns*, Cham, Palgrave.
- Ma, L., 2023. *China's Art Market Since 1978: Regional Entrepreneurship and Global Impact*, Cham, Palgrave.
- Robertson, I., 2018. *New Art, New Markets*, London, Lund Humphries.
- Robertson, I., Chong, D., Afonso, L. (eds.), 2025. *Global Art Markets: History and Current Trends*, London, Routledge.

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