ARTIGO

RANKING CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERIES: A SOCIOLOGICAL ATTEMPT FROM FRENCH CASE

CLASSIFICAR AS GALERIAS DE ARTE CONTEMPORÂNEAS: UMA TENTATIVA SOCIOLÓGICA A PARTIR DO CASO DA FRANÇA

CLASSER LES GALERIES D'ART CONTEMPORAIN: UNE TENTATIVE SOCIOLOGIQUE À PARTIR DU CAS FRANÇAIS

ORDENAR LAS GALERÍAS DE ARTE DE LO CONTEPORÁNEO: UNA TENTATIVA SOCIOLÓGICA A PARTIR DEL CASO DE FRANCIA

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ABSTRACT: Contemporary art galleries remain little known partly because the very definition of contemporary art makes it difficult to delimit their population. In order to bring more light on contemporary art galleries in France, we decided not only to try and define their population, but also to *rank* them. For this and in order to objectivize the various positions, we gathered information on all art galleries concerning: (i) such factors as their locations, participation to art fairs and recognition by public institutions, but (ii) also considering their rosters. The analysis shows a general link between the two. It also unveils a strong hierarchy between contemporary art galleries in France with a very significant presence of galleries of foreign origin in the first ranks, as a direct consequence of the high degree of internationalization of the art market.

Keywords: gallery, contemporary art, ranking, reputation, art market.

RESUMO: As galerias de arte contemporânea permanecem desconhecidas, em parte devido à delicada definição de arte contemporânea que dificulta a delimitação dos contornos desse objeto. Para conhecê-lo melhor, decidimos não apenas tentar quantificar esse grupo, mas também classificá-lo. Com o objetivo de especificar as diferentes posições, consideramos para o conjunto de galerias um primeiro conjunto de fatores (i) locais de implantação, participação em feiras e reconhecimento pelas instituições, posteriormente comparados com (ii) a lista de artistas representados. A análise mostra uma ligação geral entre os dois polos. Da mesma forma, torna visível uma forte hierarquia entre galerias de arte estabelecidas na França, com forte presença de galerias de origem estrangeira entre as primeiras posições, como conseqüência direta da internacionalização do mercado de arte.

Palavras-chave: galeria, arte contemporânea, classificação, reputação, mercado de arte.

RÉSUMÉ: Les galeries d'art contemporain restent peu connues, en partie du fait de la délicate définition de l'art contemporain qui rend difficile de délimiter les contours de cette population. Afin de mieux les connaître, nous avons décidé non seulement de tenter de recenser ce groupe mais également de le classer. Afin d'objectiver les différentes positions, nous avons considéré pour l'ensemble des galeries un premier ensemble de facteurs (i) lieux d'implantation, participation aux foires et reconnaissance par les institutions (ii) ensuite comparé à la liste des artistes représentés. L'analyse montre un lien général entre les deux pôles. Elle fait également apparaître une forte hiérarchie parmi les galeries d'art contemporain établies en France, avec une forte présence des galeries d'origine étrangère dans les premières places, conséquence directe de l'internationalisation du marché de l'art.

Mots-clés: galerie, art contemporain, classement, reputation, marché de l'art.

RESUMEN: Las galerías de arte contemporáneo siguen siendo desconocidas, en parte por el hecho de la delicada definición del arte contemporáneo que dificulta la delimitación de contornos de esta población. Para conocerlas mejor, hemos decidido no solamente intentar censar este grupo, sino también clasificarlas. Con el propósito de concretar las diferentes posiciones, hemos considerado para el conjunto de galerías un primer conjunto de factores (i) lugares de implantación, participación en ferias y reconocimiento por las instituciones, posteriormente (ii) comparados con la lista de artistas representados. El análisis muestra un vínculo general entre ambos polos. Del mismo modo, permite visibilizar una fuerte jerarquía entre las galerías de arte establecidas en Francia, con una fuerte presencia de galerías de origen extranjero entre las primeras posiciones, como consecuencia directa de la internacionalización del mercado del arte.

Palabras-clave: galería, arte contemporáneo, clasificación , reputación, mercado del arte.

1. Introduction

Although the earliest developments of the sociology of art can be found as early as the very end of the 19th century, when sociology emerged as a discipline, the domain was profoundly renewed not to say re-founded during the 1960’s in France with the double contribution of Pierre Bourdieu and his collaborators on one side and of Raymonde Moulin (Moulin, 1967) on the other (Quemin, 2017). The main contribution of Raymonde Moulin to the sociology of art was her analysis of the creation of art value at the junction of the art market and art institutions such as museums (Moulin, 1992). It seems that, for a long time, the conjunction of the two dimensions was necessary for art production and for artists to be considered as such. Furthermore, that the respective contribution of the market and that of institutions was rather balanced. However, during recent years, the part played by the market is generally considered to have increased greatly. Nowadays galleries, art fairs and auctions all play a major role in the creation of art value, not only financially speaking, as they tend to have a greater influence on the global legitimation process of art and artists. Not surprisingly, the interest of social scientists, from sociologists, economists to art historians, developed considerably during the past years. The art market and its players are scrutinized and analyzed today like never before.

Although for a long time, sociology or the social sciences at large did not show the same concern for the study of fame, celebrity or “starification” as they did for art, a number of pioneering works can be identified as early as the mid 1950’s. In *Les stars*, the French sociologist Edgar Morin (Morin, 1957) opened a path that later developed into a proper domain, now identified as “celebrity studies”. Several consistent findings in the domain can be briefly mentioned such as the famous Matthew effect that was theorized by Robert K. Merton (Merton, 1968) and later developed by his followers (Rigney, 1949) stating that, very often, “success begets success”. A number of connections were also made with other social phenomena that had been observed and theorized earlier, such as bandwagon effects (Leibenstein, 1950). More recently, the most interesting works in the celebrity studies domain focus on self-fulfilling prophecy and commensuration (Espeland & Sauder, 2007) or study the persistence of fame over time (van de Rijt, Shor, Ward & Skiena, 2013). Still, the most important contribution that opened a proper domain of study at the junction of the sociology of art and celebrity studies was that of Sir Alan Bowness in *The Conditions of Success. How the Modern Artist Rises to Fame* (Bowness, 1989). Although Sir Alan Bowness was neither a sociologist nor was he trained in the sociology domain - having trained in art history, he was a curator and museum director - his perspective was very close to sociology and he strongly influenced that discipline through his analysis of the different steps that lead visual artists to success and consecration. The works that we developed when studying star artists in the contemporary visual arts (Quemin, 2013a) are directly tributary to all the previous authors. As we could show on rankings before analyzing them and the social role that they play in the contemporary art world today, these instruments and especially rankings of artists have multiplied in recent years. Still, there are no proper rankings of galleries. Hence the question: can rankings of contemporary art galleries be built and how can they be elaborated? And what can they reveal about the structure and function of the art market?

In this article, we will illustrate this with the example of private galleries in the French contemporary art market.

2. Rankings of artists and their development

Today, rankings have become fitting players in the contemporary art world. Although their early origin can be found as soon as art history emerged as a discipline and was associated with aesthetic evaluation (Vasari, 1550). The first attempts of quantification emerged in the early years of the 18th century thanks to the French author Roger de Piles (de Piles, 1708). Still, although Roger de Piles attributed marks to artists on four different criteria (drawing, color, composition and expression), he never thought to calculate a global mark for each artist, which would have in turn made it possible to elaborate a ranking of artists by comparing their medium mark. The first ever ranking of artists was published by the French art magazine *Connaissance des Arts* in 1955, three years after the review was founded. It was only published on 5 occasions in the years 1955, 1961, 1966, 1971 and 1976. Still, the methodology used to rank the artists was relatively vague: a selection of experts belonging to the art world were asked to name the most important artists of the time and their answers were consequently aggregated.

By 1970, rankings began to become more systematic and rigorous with the creation of the German Kunstkompass (the art compass). Willy Bongard, its inventor, was an economic journalist and he happened to be very involved in the contemporary art world (notably a friend of the artist Joseph Beuys). If, in an academic perspective for art historians, contemporary art is generally considered to have emerged in 1945, after the Second World War, however art institutions such as museums and contemporary art centers normally adopt a different convention: the very end of the 1960’s and the very beginning of the 1970’s are generally considered a more appropriate landmark to date the proper emergence of contemporary art. In 1969, before he later became a star curator, Harald Szeemann organized a seminal exhibition focusing especially on conceptual and minimalist art at the Bern Kunsthalle. This show greatly renewed the perspective on art. Almost simultaneously to the emergence of the new category of contemporary art, the double point of art value from an aesthetic and economic standpoint was questioned under the influence of the general redefinition of art. In order to reduce the uncertainty associated with the new conception of art and the new criteria with which to evaluate it, a new ranking, the Kunstkompass was created. Every year or so, Willy Bongard and his collaborators – later, after Bongard’s death, his widow, Linde Rohr-Bongard became responsible for elaborating the ranking – published the Kunstkompass, a ranked list of the top one hundred most visible artists in the world. Occasions of visibility for an artist were split into three types and were then given a certain number of points proportional to the importance of the event: solo shows in prominent art institutions, whether they were museums or art centers, collective shows, and thirdly reviews in influential art journals such as *Flash Art, Art in America* and *Art Forum*. At the end of every year, the number of points for each artist was summed up and the ranking of the most visible artists was published. From 1970 until 2007, the ranking was published in the German economic magazine *Capital* and from 2008 until 2015, the ranking was published in another German economic journal *Manager Magazin*[1].

The end of the Kunstkompass in terms of visibility and influence was largely caused by the creation of a competing ranking of artists, that of the German firm Artfacts. Having been launched in 2003, the Kunstkompass in *Capital* in 2008 was replaced by this new competing indicator under the denomination “Capital Kunstmarkt Kompass”. Based on an algorithm, the ranking is a striking

[1] Although the Kunstkompass still exists today, it now generates very little attention as a much more elaborated ranking of artists, that of Artfacts, tends to overshadow it (Quemin, 2013a).

example of the use of big data, also compiling occasions of visibility, but much more numerous ones, some of them associated with the institutional pole (museum and contemporary art centers' exhibitions) and others with art journals and magazines but also with the market (presence in commercial art galleries, art fairs and auctions) among many other more minor occasions of visibility (such as art schools, art hotels and non-profits). In 2014, 100. 000 artists were ranked by Artfacts and a total of 400. 000 were listed in the database (300. 000 being unranked). Today, more than half a million artists are included in the data base.

Among the most notorious rankings in the contemporary art world, one can also mention the 'Power 100', but when investigating the point of rankings in the contemporary art world, we found no less than a dozen of different rankings, be they (mostly) of artists, even artworks (!) or rankings of players within the art world in general. We did not find any ranking of gallerists although these players are included in the Power 100, the aforementioned ranking of the most powerful players in the art world and they represent around one fifth of the listed personalities, a similar share to collectors and only slightly less than artists that represent approximately a quarter of the referenced population in that indicator (Quemin, 2013a).

3. Methodology: Fieldwork as a proper insider and questions of definition

As given our familiarity to both the contemporary art world and to the rankings of artists that we have been analyzing for years now, we decided to elaborate a ranking of contemporary art galleries and to study how that kind of instrument could inform us about the structure of the contemporary art market. As we have been investigating the French art market for nearly three decades now, we decided to limit our ranking to the French gallery scene, or, more precisely, to galleries with a location in France, some of them being branches of galleries of foreign origin. Our knowledge of the French art market relies on our fieldwork as a sociologist of art during these near to three decades but also from our more recent involvement as an art critic and art journalist that specializes in the gallery scene. Although being a player in the art world that is studied is a very common position in such domains as dance or music (Becker, 1982, Buscatto, 2007), this position is very uncommon in the visual arts domain. When, very exceptionally, pioneer Raymonde Moulin wrote a text for an exhibition catalogue, she did it under a pseudonym as if it had not been legitimate as a sociologist to combine her activity in the social sciences with another one that made her a genuine player of the art world. Our double position and especially the second role as an art critic and journalist opened many doors to us to better understand how the gallery world functions. Being a journalist as a second occupation and in a position to help galleries with promoting their artists, we were constantly rewarded with many invitations to openings, countless cocktail parties and subsequent dinners. Not only were formal interviews incredibly easy to obtain if we wanted to use that specific research method, but thanks to these social events we managed to observe and proceed unnoticed as we were welcomed and expected with our roles as an art critic and journalist in the art world (Peretz, 2004). In many cases, we could check if the collected information from either participant observation or through informal interviews - just 'chatting' with players of the gallery world - was radically different from what we could obtain – and did obtain – through formal interviews. In the second case, interviewees were much more normative in their answers. The fact that several (very) informal interviews with gallerists and their collaborators were made during convivial events where alcoholic beverages – among which fine wine and especially champagne - are offered, often freed the speech significantly. Although, for years now, we have been a constant promoter of quantitative methods working with figures and statistics in order to objectivize social facts, we have always been more convinced that a very strong and regular practice of field work is absolutely fundamental to better understand social processes and social worlds, such as the case for contemporary art galleries. As a matter of fact, complex statistical indicators are often used by « social scientists » who not only know very little about the domain that they are supposed to study, art in our case, but who often have few connections to the social world that they study, in this case the art world. To say things quite abruptly, in the domain of art and the social sciences, more often than not, the use of complex statistics as evidence only proves that those who use them know very little about art and art worlds. In our opinion, authors tend to conceal their ignorance with instruments that are mostly aimed at giving a scientific appearance to their work.

Before galleries could be ranked, it was necessary to define the limits of the group to rank. This raised the question of what can be defined as a contemporary art gallery. Galleries are rather easy to define: structures with a commercial purpose and a physical space organizing exhibitions of works. Still, defining contemporary art was not as simple. Although commentators and analysts, among which social scientists, sometimes tend to offer different definitions for contemporary art, our long acquaintance with the domain has convinced us that the best definition is the one that is inspired by an interactionist perspective (Becker, 1982). Contemporary art is fundamentally and ultimately what is considered as such by members of the contemporary art world, and even more by the most integrated actors of this social world (Becker, 1982, Moulin, 1992). That being said, it seems necessary to mention that today even more than during the 1970's, a time when this factor was already significant, the international dimension is an essential part in the definition of contemporary art and in the activity of proper contemporary art galleries. During the last decade, private transactions in the art market have become ever more dependent on the art fair system, a commercial organization mode that tends to reflect that of the galleries themselves. The more contemporary these events claim to be, the more international they become (Quemin, 2013b). This is how, in a research that we conducted on contemporary art galleries and their participation to art fairs during the year 2008, we selected 41 contemporary art fairs held during that year from around the world that presented at least a level of international dimension and we referenced all participating galleries. Thus, we identified approximately 2,300 contemporary art galleries in the world (2.322 to be precise) that had any degree of access to the international art market represented by art fairs in 2008 (Quemin, 2013b). The number of galleries that we managed to analyse through the described method and that we could thus objectivize gave a result that is very close to a data produced by an actor of the art world, the firm Artnet. This online platform publishes results of artists at auctions and also enables its users to sell, look for and buy works of art - with more than 39,000 artists represented by more than 2.200 galleries from all over the world (located in more than 250 cities).

The number of French galleries that we found in the same research (Quemin, 2013 b) was 150 for the year 2008. It may be necessary to underline here that our approach was deliberately inclusive as we decided to also take into account art fairs that were less international, with few nationalities of galleries being represented, and we also included galleries that only had access to "international" art fairs organized in their own countries: this represents an easier form of access to the art market as international art fairs are generally more open to participating galleries of the countries in which they take place.

Far from our figure of 150 contemporary art galleries in France and 2.300 for the entire world, a recent survey published by the Département des Etudes, de la Prospective et de la Statistique of the French Ministry of Culture and Communication listed nearly 2.200 contemporary art galleries (Rouet, 2013) in France. Of course, the number of contemporary art galleries depends on the definition of contemporary art: if all shops that sell works or images are included in this definition, for instance all those that sell frames and also offer decorative artefacts to their clients, the number of so-considered and defined contemporary art galleries literally explodes. In our case, it seemed absolutely essential to take into consideration the perspective of players that are actuality integrated in the contemporary art world in order to better evaluate the group of proper contemporary art galleries. Although the French Ministry of Culture and Communication considers an ensemble of 2.200 contemporary art galleries in France, it is absolutely certain that a vast majority of players of the contemporary art world would reject most structures that were considered as contemporary art galleries only because very little attention was paid to the social representations in the social world that was considered. Moreover, it may be necessary to add that even when we mentioned a number of almost 150 contemporary art galleries in France, the most integrated players in this sector would undoubtedly question the 'contemporaneity' or even the aesthetic value of many galleries that our own methodology included in the group. Still, it seemed important to us to use some objective criteria and that the borders and content of the group should be determined by the values that are quite generally shared in it.

4. Ranking criteria: from unreliable sales criteria to organizational and reputational ones

As we have just seen, although there did not exist a ranking of art galleries, there was an official evaluation of the number of art galleries in France but it presented a significant difference with the one that we had produced that can easily be explained by the radically different definitions and methodologies that were adopted. Having considered the number and limits of the population of contemporary art galleries in France and having presented and justified our own perspective, the next step consisted in defining the criteria to build a ranking. Once again, the question was: what criteria should be used?

In order to objectivize the importance of contemporary art galleries, the most spontaneous criterion which comes to mind is perhaps the value of transactions. A long familiarity with the art market has convinced us that all data related to the sales of artworks, whether during art fairs or in the spaces of galleries, cannot be known with any decent reliability. Although the figures for public sales at auctions can be considered reliable, it is absolutely impossible to give any credit to the published figures in the global art market when they include both public sales and private transactions. For one year, two competing reports were published on the global art market worldwide. The first published by the economist Clare McAndrew for Art Basel estimated the global amount of the art market in 2016 to be 56.6 million dollars, but a competing report published by the finance specialist Rachel Pownall for TEFAF, the Maastricht art fair, produced a radically different estimation of only 45 million dollars. Their differences of evaluation were enormous, the first figure being 26% higher than the latter! To give just one example of opacity within private transactions, in 2015, a painting by Paul Gauguin, *When Will You Marry?*, was widely reported to have been sold to the Qatar museums for the record amount at the time of 300 million dollars in a private sale. Yet, in 2017, when the transaction came to court due to an unpaid commission to the intermediary Simon de Pury, the information eventually perspired that the painting had been sold for 210 million dollars 'only', nearly a third less than what had been publicized two years earlier. The initially announced figure must have logically been integrated in the statistics of so-called experts who claim that they can produce reliable estimations of the art market that include both auction sales and private transactions. Still, a long practice of field work in art galleries and frequent visits as a journalist made us very familiar with many structures, thus turning from the status of an outsider to an insider, have convinced us of the opposite. We could see on many occasions that the use of cash is very common in art galleries. Once, we could even joke with the accountant of an important art gallery during a cocktail party that was held at the end of the fiscal year. As we told her:

> *Hey, don't drink too much tonight or you won't be able to cheat on figures tomorrow and you won't reach a 20% underestimation of the sales! (She laughs) Then she adds: "If I couldn't do much better than 20%, I would be fired, you know*.

Then we had a very serious – although informal – conversation in which she explained how she could use more or less legal techniques in order to reduce the amount of taxes paid by the gallery and she insisted on the use of cash and payments abroad. The very example of the sale of the painting by Gauguin, the previous observation and the informal interview in a gallery all show that it is fundamentally impossible to provide reliable information regarding gallery sales. As free ports also perfectly illustrate it, the art market is discreet not to say that it is secretive in essence. The fact that some sales are public at auctions and can be known with a very satisfactory degree of reliability (although, even there, some prices can be manipulated in order to influence the price range of an artist) should not cover the fact that the art market as a whole is remarkably opaque.

As we were conscious of the impossibility to rely on the sales figures and in order to build a ranking of contemporary art galleries, we decided to develop a two phase approach by combining two factors that could reflect the gallery's importance. The first step consisted in gathering and aggregating factors which demonstrated the gallery's reputation, signs of recognition and access to the market for contemporary art galleries. It was important that these factors should express recognition by the art world itself. We aimed to identify a high enough number of factors that could express a diversity of signs of recognition or legitimacy in the French social world of contemporary art. Secondly, the next step consisted in attributing coefficients that could reflect in a satisfactory way the respective weight of all the various signs of recognition. Once again, our long familiarity with the French gallery scene made it possible for us to determine a satisfactory value for each coefficient. Soon after, we conducted more than 50 informal interviews with gallerists and their collaborators in order to fine-tune the initial values. Another possibility would have been to organize focus groups with these actors of the art world. Still, if the purpose of the research had been presented, it is highly plausible that a significant proportion of the participants would have exaggerated the weight of the factors in order to tamper with the results to reach a better position in the ranking. Here, informal interviews or even discussions were more efficient as the general purpose of the questions was not explained. Not only did we ask our interlocutors about the respective weight of the factors but we also asked if they could suggest a criterion that would illustrate the importance of galleries both in terms of reputation and economic importance. Several actors mentioned the turnover of the gallery, to which we objected that it was impossible to obtain such information with a satisfactory degree of reliability; they all agreed with the objection.

We first proceeded with building a table including all of the identified galleries through considering the following sources of information and we attributed each factor the coefficient that is mentioned between brackets after introducing it:

1. Presence in a professional gallery list (‘Galeries mode d’emploi’) for which galleries have to apply and are selected: 1 point;
2. Member of a representative body (Comité professionnel des galeries d’art) for which gallerists have to be co-opted to join: 1 point;
3. Having already had one artist in their roster who was awarded the Marcel Duchamp prize: 2 points;
4. Having already had one artist in their roster who was only nominated to the Marcel Duchamp prize but not awarded it: 1 point;
5. Having already sold works to the Fonds National d’Art Contemporain, the most important French public collection which makes its purchases public: 1 point if only once; 2 points if it happened in different sessions (which tends to show that the gallery is more continuously “on the radar” of this very important public structure).

As art fairs have become essential not to say vital to contemporary art galleries, this also had to be reflected in our methodology. Once again, we regularly asked French gallerists and their direct collaborators which art fairs – both national and foreign - were most important for them and about their respective weight for the gallery. We considered participation during the previous 12 months. The websites of the selected art fairs were another source that we browsed in order to identify French contemporary art galleries with some international scope.

Considering participation to French art fairs, the list and coefficients were as follows:

1. Foire Internationale d’Art Contemporain (FIAC), the main Paris contemporary art fair: 5 points;
2. Off(icielle): 1 point;
3. Art Paris: 1 point;
4. Drawing Now: 1 point.

Unlike FIAC that is a genuine international art fair and generally considered a prestigious event, other art fairs presented a lower degree of prestige. Off(icielle) was a satellite art fair that was organized during the FIAC. These three art fairs were selected because they are much more inclusive than the FIAC and they were included in our criteria in order to encompass more than if we had only taken into account the most prestigious French event.

As far as prestigious international art fairs organized abroad are concerned, Art Basel is the most important worldwide (Quemin, 2013b). We listed the events that are the most significant to French galleries and, there again, the coefficients were attributed in order to try to reflect as precisely as possible what is at stake in each of them. The more important the impact in terms of prestige and potential sales, the higher the coefficient.

1. Art Basel: 10 points;
2. Art Basel Miami Beach: 5 points;
3. Frieze London / Frieze New York / The Armory Show (in New York City) / Art Basel Hong Kong: 3 points were allocated if a gallery participated to one only of these fairs during the previous 12 months, 5 points if they participated to two or more of these art fairs;
4. Art Brussels: 1 point.

The method that we developed made it possible to determine the number of "significant or "prominent" contemporary art galleries" in France, those with a proper insertion within the contemporary art circuit. We found 192 galleries in 2016, which is higher than the 150 galleries that we estimated in 2008. Still, it is generally considered that between 2008 and 2016, the contemporary art market developed very significantly. Hence, the number that we calculated is compatible with the estimation in a previous research that focused on art fairs and in which galleries were only a second concern (Quemin, 2013b). Besides, it should be stressed that, whatever the method that is developed and adopted, it would be naive to believe that one can achieve a precise figure. Each time, what is at stake is more obtaining an order of size, a scale, rather than a precise figure. Once again, it seems necessary to underline that the number of contemporary art galleries in France is far from 2.200.

In addition, we included other criteria that could be considered to reflect the economic means and the scope of the galleries:

1. Having two or more spaces in Paris (and in its suburbs): 3 points;
2. Having at least one gallery space abroad: 5 points;
3. Still, as the space is not neutral and as some countries and cities are more important in terms of market, we had to consider also where the foreign branches of the galleries were located, be it the original location of the gallery for foreign galleries that opened a space in Paris or subsidiaries that were opened by French galleries in order to develop internationally.
4. Two extra points were allocated to galleries that opened a space in London or New York City as these two cities play a central role in the international art market and offer privileged access to major collectors. For the same reason, 4 points were awarded to galleries being present both in London and in New York City. As given the central role played by "mega-galleries" on the international art market, 10 points were allocated to the galleries that had spaces in more than five countries including the UK with London and the US with New York City.

The approach that we developed introduced 19 different criteria that were all meant to reflect the importance of the gallery in the French art market and scene. A gallery ranking revealing a high degree of stratification. Apart from making it possible to determine the present number of contemporary art galleries in France, the method produced a ranking that could reveal strong stratification of the activity. A high proportion of the galleries that appeared on the list received solely one or two points, a sign of a very limited integration to the contemporary art world. At the other end of the spectrum, many galleries showed as extremely active, highly integrated and often combined this with a remarkable work tool in terms of spaces, both in Paris and abroad (see Table 1).

Rank &Gallery name	Number of points N.	Nationality	Paris District
1- Gagosian	45	US	8th & suburb
2- Emmanuel Perrotin	42	French	Marais
3- Nathalie Obadia	40	French	Marais
4- Thaddaeus Ropac	38	Austrian	Marais & suburb
5- Lelong	37	French	8ème
6- Marian Goodman	36	US	Marais
7- Kamel Mennour	34	French	Saint-Germain-des-Près
8- Daniel Templon	31	French	Marais
9- Chantal Crousel	30	French	Marais

9- Peter Freeman	30	US	Marais
9- Almine Rech	30	French	Marais
9- Jocelyn Wolff	30	French	Belleville
13- Taka Ishii	27	Japanese	Marais
14- Continua	26	Italian	Outside of Paris
14- Art Concept	26	French	Marais
16- Air de Paris	22	French	13th district
16- Karsten Greve	22	German	Marais
16- Max Hetzler	22	German	Marais
19 – gb agency	21	French	Marais
20 – Michel Rein	20	French	Marais

Table 1: The top of the ranking: star galleries and other important ones in France.
Source: Own Authorship.

Gagosian, the art world leader, with a flagship in the Mecca of Chelsea, in New York City, and no less than 17 gallery spaces in the world comes first. The top twenty positions of the ranking are occupied by 12 galleries of French origin and eight that were originally created abroad: three in the United States – all located at the top of the list (1st, 6th and 9th) -, two in Germany, one in Austria, one in Italy and one in Japan. At a time when the art market is supposed to be completely globalized and national borders are often seen as negligible, our data shows that territory still plays a prominent role. The French market is either controlled by national galleries or by galleries of a very limited group of countries that generally occupy prominent positions in the art market (Quemin, 2013b). The impact of territory can also be seen through the location of galleries. In the top twenty, all galleries but one (*Continua*) are located in Paris (two of them opened a second (mega-)space in its suburb in a later step of their development). Moreover, even inside Paris, territory is not neutral. The Marais district plays a central role as a defined gallery cluster: 14 of the 20 leading galleries that we identified with the previous criteria gather in this part of Paris. Two other galleries are located in the very bourgeois 8th district, one is located in Saint-Germain-des-Près, a district that, until the 1960's had a high concentration of galleries before it declined when the majority left for the Marais during the 1970's. The last two galleries in the list are located in more peripheral districts. One is located in 13th arrondissement, a neighborhood that was once planned to become a gallery district but later failed in hosting them in the long run. The other gallery is located in Belleville, a popular district that has tried for many years to challenge the Marais but has never managed to outshine it.

The hierarchy of art galleries established in France is very marked. The top three galleries accumulated 45, 42 and 40 points respectively. If the 20th gallery in the list earned 20 points, its immediate follower only received 17 points and only 33 galleries had more than 10 points. 31 galleries were between 5 and 10 points. 30 galleries had 3 or 4 points, 34 had 2 points and no less than 64 had one point only. Thus demonstrating that a strong majority of contemporary art galleries have limited access to the market and receive little recognition. All the structures that obtained a maximum of 4 points only account for two-thirds of the population (128 out of 192 galleries) and the galleries that had one point only even represent one-third of the total number of galleries (64 out of 192). Our empirical data provides a striking illustration of the model of an oligopoly with fringe competition as economists have theoretized their existence in the culture and the arts domain (Benhamou, 2003).

Afterwards, once the list of the 192 contemporary art galleries in France is set and ranked, what about… their "rosters" (i.e. the list of artists whom they represent) and what do the rosters show about the prestige / legitimacy / power (as all these notions are intertwined in the art world) of galleries? For this second phase in the elaboration of a ranking of French contemporary art galleries, we used the same list of galleries that we obtained previously when considering the legitimacy or recognition of art galleries and their access to the market, but what we took into account here was the reputation of the list of artists represented by all of the galleries that achieved the highest scores prior. The aim was to evaluate the 'quality' (Misdrahi Flores, 2013) of contemporary art galleries through the visibility of the artists whom they represent. For each gallery, we considered all represented artists and their rank in the database elaborated by the site Artfacts. Subsequently we selected the 10 artists with the lowest rank (that is to say those with the highest degree of visibility or prestige as they are the closest ranked to the first position in the ranking). Why did we take into account only ten artists and not the whole roster? Although the average size of the roster of important galleries is generally around 30, it can be as high as 130 for Gagosian, an absolute record breaker, but in some opposite cases, it can also be as low as 12 or 15. The logic underlying the number of artists in a roster can vary. Some galleries can integrate artists with a low level of visibility because they cannot do better for most of their artists, but others can also integrate young artists and work on their careers. In that very case, a high rank may be only temporary and may be part of a strategy to develop an artist's career in the long run. Considering 10 artists only limits the impact of these very different logics. Besides, for a very high proportion of galleries it is often mentioned that most of their sales are made with their 'best' artists, their most renowned artists are those on which galleries must concentrate most of their efforts. That being said, we decided to calculate the medium rank of the 10 "best" artists of all the galleries at the top of our previous list.

Gagosian	6.9
Thaddaeus Ropac	24.7
Marian Goodman	35.2
Lelong	82.8
Chantal Crousel	87.8
Continua	95.4
Almine Rech	129.6
Karsten Greve	137.6
Daniel Templon	224.3
Taka Ishii	230.9
Kamel Mennour	239.7
Max Hetzler	242.7
Peter Freeman	247
Emmanuel Perrotin PerrPPerrotin	279.8
Air de Paris	436.3
Xippas	609.9
Nathalie Obadia	628.5
Michel Rein	694.2
Gb agency	719.0
Mor Charpentier	739.0

Table 2: Ranking in Terms of Medium Range of the Top 10 Artists in the Rosters
Source: Own Authorship.

Once again, Gagosian, the art world leader, is at the top of the ranking, way ahead of his two potential challengers, Thaddaeus Ropac and Marian Goodman. It should be noted that, this time, the top three positions are occupied by galleries of foreign origin, two being American and one being Austrian. Then comes a group of three galleries with rather similar average ranks of their 10 top artists: two galleries are French (Lelong and Chantal Crousel), the third, Continua, is Italian and was rather low in our previous ranking. Although they opened a branch in France, unlike all other international players that developed a space there, they did not choose Paris as a base but Les Moulins, a rural location in Seine-et-Marne relatively far from the French capital city. Hence, the gallery, although characterized by a high quality roster, is less inserted in the French gallery scene as it tends to be centralized in Paris, which showed in the previous ranking. Out of the 20 top galleries – when considering their rosters - that are installed in France, only four of them, Chantal Crousel (ranked 5th), Air de Paris (15th), gb agency (19th) and Mor Charpentier (20th) did not have any location abroad. Apart from these four examples, and it should be noted that 3 out of the 4 galleries are at the bottom of the top twenty list, there is a strong correlation between an international development with the openings of branches abroad (a characteristic that remains very limited in the contemporary art gallery world including those that operate in France) and a roster that is characterized by the strong visibility of artists.

Another point that can be commented on in the previous ranking is the appearance in the top 12 positions of other galleries of foreign origin: apart from Italian Continua (ranked 6th), German Karsten Greve (ranked 8th) and Max Hetzler (ranked 12th), and Japanese Taka Ishii (ranked 10th). In this second ranking, only 11 out of the 20 top galleries are of French origin, and they mostly concentrate at the bottom of the list. In a final step of our methodology, we combined the two previous rankings.

Gallery name	Overall rank	Recognition	Roster	Roster Rank – Recognition Rank
Gagosian	1	1	1	0
Thaddaeus Ropac	2	4	2	-2
Marian Goodman	3	6	3	-3
Lelong	4	5	4	-1
Chantal Crousel	5	9	5	-4
Almine Rech	6	11	7	-4
Emmanuel Perrotin	7	2	14	12
Daniel Templon	8	8	9	-1
Kamel Mennour	9	7	11	4
Continua	10	13	6	-7
Nathalie Obadia	11	3	17	12
Peter Freeman	12	10	13	3
Karsten Greve	13	16	8	-8
Taka Ishii	14	15	10	-5
Max Hetzler	15	18	12	-6
Jocelyn Wolff	16	9	21	12
Air de Paris	17	16	15	-1
Art Concept	18	13	23	10
Michel Rein	19	20	18	-2
Gb agency	20	19	19	0

Table 3: Global Rank: Comparison of the Two Rankings in Terms of Recognition of the Gallery & Access to the Market and in terms of 'quality' of its roster.
Source: Own Authorship.

If one compares the combination of the recognition of the gallery and its work instrument / access to the market and its roster, there appears to be a positive connection – or even an excellent one - between the two in general (see Gagosian at the top of the list or gb agency at the bottom of it). Still, in some cases, the galleries do significantly better in the first domain than in the second one. This is true for gallerist Nathalie Obadia who compensates a somewhat less prestigious roster with a frenetic activity on the market. The same can be said for gallerist Emmanuel Perrotin who, although he has developed a remarkable work tool for many years with high quality spaces both in Paris and abroad, has neither managed to push his own initial artists to very high levels of visibility nor attracted star artists. The same relative weakness of the roster can also be identified for other galleries such as Jocelyn Wolff and Air de Paris. All these galleries are of French origin. On the opposite, galleries that do significantly better in terms of roster than in terms of recognition of the gallery and its work instrument / access to the market are more likely to be of foreign origin. This tends to show that, when they open a space in France, they do not invest in the French territory as much as the quality of their rosters would suggest. And once again, when it comes to accessing the market, territory matters.

The ranking that we created shows that the market of contemporary art galleries in France is highly concentrated in Paris at its top as, out of the 20 most important galleries, 19 are located in Paris, Continua being the only exception. Besides, galleries of foreign origin play an important role among the biggest players. No less than eight galleries out of the top 20 are of foreign origin and, even more remarkable, all of them are in the top three positions. American galleries do extremely well with Gagosian in 1st position, Marian Goodman in 3rd and Peter Freeman in 12th position. Then come the Austrian and German galleries with Austrian Thaddaeus Ropac in 2nd position and German Karsten Greve in 13th rank and Max Hetzler in 15th position. The other two galleries of foreign origin are Italian Galleria Continua (10th) and Japanese Taka Ishii (14th). These last two galleries adopt a rather low profile in France in regards to their international status: as we already mentioned, Continua is located in the countryside, in a part of Seine-et-Marne far from Paris, and Taka Ishii only opened a tiny space in Paris and many insiders in the French art world do not even know about it.

4. Conclusion

Although rankings of artists emerged in different steps, first in the 1950's for their earliest developments and at the beginning of the 1970's for a more systematized version, it must be noted that, in recent years, several rankings have multiplied in the contemporary art world. Remarkably, in a social world that is obsessed with rankings in order to reduce the uncertainty on value that is characteristic of contemporary art, no ranking of art galleries has been created until our own attempt. However, by mobilizing our knowledge of all the rankings that already exist and our familiarity with the gallery scene as an insider, we could elaborate a ranking of contemporary art galleries by studying the French case. We found it appropriate to combine two sub-rankings, one reflecting the recognition of the gallery and its work instrument / access to the market, and the other relying on the rosters of the galleries. The various steps of the ranking that we built made it possible for us not only to evaluate the number of significant and leading contemporary art galleries in France, but also to show a very hierarchized structure of the market that clearly illustrates the economic model of the oligopoly with fringe competition. Not only could we reveal this marked hierarchy, be it in terms of recognition of the gallery and its work instrument / access to the market or regarding the roster, but we could also identify the most important players. When focusing on them, we could then show that, even in a sector that is as internationalized not to say “globalized” as the contemporary art market, the nationality of the galleries seems to have a real impact. Apart from Japan that is peripheral in the art world, the best ranked foreign galleries are Italian, German – one is Austrian as a matter of fact, but it was not founded in Vienna, but in Salzburg, a city that is located in walking distance from Germany – and American.

The research also had an experimental dimension in regards to its reception by the art world and by the players who were at the center. A simplified version of the results was published in three consecutive issues of the French art newspaper *Le Journal des Arts* in October and November 2016. The ranking based on recognition and access to the market was published one week before the FIAC and a special issue was also printed and given for free during the fair. In those unusually long articles, the methodology was also published and commented on. Reactions to the published ranking showed how strong their impact can be. Several gallerists with high rankings called to thank us for their excellent position in the ranking. One, whose ranking was lower than what he expected, assaulted us (verbally) in public, raising the usual argument often opposed to sociologists when they unveil social facts that it was not true because… it could not be true… Another gallerist whose gallery was not included in the top list even called us in order to ask if we could “find some arrangement” for the gallery to appear in the ranking! All of these reactions show a degree of misunderstanding with the objectivizing function of sociology but they also show how important rankings can be for all actors of the contemporary art world. Although they are often criticized, people know that these rankings – in the best cases – unveil a reality and that they have a performative dimension, and even more so as their methodology is rigorous.

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