

# Art and Money



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Edited by

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The “Art and Money” symposium was held in the Dunedin School of Art, Otago Polytechnic, partnered by the Brandbach, Dept. of Marketing, School of Business, University of Otago, on August 30, 2013. The symposium organiser was Peter Stupples, the editor of this volume of selected papers, who was also curator of the exhibition that accompanied the symposium.

The symposium was the result of a challenge from Dr Paul Stock, a member of the Programme Committee for the previous symposium, “Art and Food,” that we would not have the courage to discuss the intimate relationship between art and money. It was a challenge we could not resist. The call for papers drew an enthusiastic and varied response, from those who wanted to talk about the depiction of money in images to those who lamented art’s dependency upon money from patrons and government agencies—art proved that it is still a region of public life replete with angry idealists, who do not believe the world pays enough for such a key element of cultural well-being.

Thanks go to Professor Leoni Schmidt, Head of the Dunedin School of Art, for her steadfast academic and financial support for the series of annual symposia and to Dr Roel Wijland, the inspired leader of the Brandbach—“a virtual place where a diverse group of talented students make adventurous advertising ideas happen.” Dr Wijland created a website and posters for the symposium and contributed to the cost of advertising. The Otago Community Trust supported the venture for the third year running.

The inventive and enthusiastic students of Culinary Arts at Otago Polytechnic, under the leadership of Associate Professor Richard Mitchell, put on a splendid supper event in the Bank of New Zealand’s old building on Princes Street in Dunedin, a building that is itself a work of art, formerly dedicated to the circulation of money.

The hanging of the exhibition could not have taken place without the assistance of Clive Humphreys, David Green and, above all Neil Emmerson. Fiona Clarkson handled the media release. Sarah Arnell and Sarah Buchholz organised the food, assisted by Hannah Knight and Amelia Dougherty. IT support was in the capable hands of Ted Whitaker.

As usual these public events rely upon the work of a large number of volunteers who willingly give of their time and expertise, a fine example of what Leoni Schmidt in her chapter calls the “gift economy.”

# INTRODUCTION

PETER STUPPLES

Jacob Burckhardt describes “art” as the “fruit of reflection and careful adaptation” and in this dialectical sense all aspects of the social development of cultures can be characterised as “art.”

As the majority of the Italian states [in the Renaissance] were in their internal constitution works of art...so was their relation to one another and to foreign countries also a work of art.<sup>1</sup>

This included trade and commerce as well as the manufacture of artworks as more commonly understood.

There exists in the general social consciousness, however, a perceived difference between art and commerce, a difference that is generally unarticulated but has something to do with the moral and spiritual values seemingly ascribed to art as opposed to their absence in the grubby world of business—art floats on a celestial cloud with the Gods, soaring above the earthly world of brute trade. The celestial clouds billow with moral rectitude, aspire to an almost sacred aura, bear the souls of artists in apotheosis to their heavenly rewards or fear damnation when there is any sustained talk of coins of earthly realms or gossip of price and market.

Yet the truth is quite otherwise. And always has been.

Indeed art and money—in the broadest sense of their dyadic interaction—have only too much in common. Both are spheres of social activity that carry symbolic values. A coin is simply a piece of metal, usually an alloy, stamped with signs to give it symbolic meaning, to give it a value, a value that changes with the vicissitudes of its economic life, or, when no longer legal tender, with its life as a collectable. A painting is a piece of canvas, stretched on a frame to make it taut, that is then covered with pigment, brushed with an image, a sign that gives it value, a value that changes with the vicissitudes of its aesthetic and symbolic life, with its commodity value. Art and money come together whenever the values of both are exchanged within a market—in trade between artist and

client/patron, between dealer and customer, between competitors for social authority.

Art is capital. Art is an investment. Possessing art of value is a display of economic power, of the difference between the rich and poor, between those who buy labour and those who carry out the wishes of those commanding capital. Art is indeed a measure of status, of authority, of wealth, of abundantly disposable assets, of raw power.

As Joy Monteath points out in chapter 2, when the Italian merchant Francesco Datini grew in financial stature from local trader to European magnate, he was no longer satisfied with domestic images on which to focus his religious devotions, but commissioned frescoes and hospitals, paintings and a palazzo. His businesses even traded in art and crafts. He believed that having his portrait, and that of his family, painted onto a wooden panel or canvas as part of a religious composition, would give him a better chance to gain grander intangible merits, to advance the possibility of a secure and comfortable life after death.

Burckhardt points out the centrality of the money economy to the city-states of Italy in the Renaissance. Indeed the powerful were obsessed with money and treasure. Money was a measure of their success. Renaissance Italy gave rise to the art of statistics to measure wealth and tax dues, to count populations and the exchange of goods, to put a value on everything both within the states' accumulated capital but also in the flow of trade.

In 1478 we have...a most important and in its way complete view of the commerce and trades of [Florence], some of which may be wholly or partly reckoned among the fine arts—such as those which had to do with damasks and gold and silver embroidery, with woodcarving and intarsia, with the sculpture of arabesques in marble and sandstone, with portraits in wax, and with jewellery and work in gold.<sup>2</sup>

Studies of Masaccio's *Tribute Money* often concentrate on matters of perspective or the depiction of light, leaving the subject without comment, as if the very subject of tax and commerce were inappropriate for an essay on art history. Yet, as we have already noted, taxes and commerce were an essential fact of life in Renaissance Italy. Warring princes and *condottieri* contested for tribute, customs dues and taxes. Popes and cardinals fought each other over money and the power to gather favours and tribute. Masaccio appears to show Christ giving his blessing to the legitimate taxing of those with capital whilst condemning the exploitation of those without ("children.") At the time the fresco was being painted (1426-7) Florence was reforming its tax system and it was those "legitimate" taxes that were used by Florentine officials to pay Masaccio and Masolino for

their decoration in the Brancacci Chapel. In chapter 1 Estelle Alma Maré adds a further footnote to this subject.

It was during the Renaissance that the master craftsman of an artist's workshop began to be elevated within the market place by higher prices for his (or less often her) work and within the patron and intellectual classes through the perception of an originality, evidence of a divine gift or "genius," bringing fame and, more rarely, fortune. The divine gift distinguished the artistic production of the "master" from that of the artisan, from the apprentices in his studio, the thinker-maker from the workman-maker, the originator and leader of a set of visual ideas from those content to repeat images from a pattern book. Yet, however famous or original, the artist rarely, if ever, commanded financial or political capital. The artist was dependent upon those with money, the patron classes, for a livelihood. Money flowed more in the exchange of artworks in the market place or political arena than into the pockets of the artists themselves. However making money through banking and trade was quite different to the earlier brutish wielding of power by feudal landholders and their henchmen. Lending money for a fee (interest) was akin to usury and frowned upon both by the Christian church and Islam. Subterfuges had to be employed, such as getting the dirty work of lending done by non-Christians or non-Muslims, such as Jews, or employing complex systems that appeared no longer to be "usury," such as the Medicis' deployment of bills of exchange. However there were other ways to ensure the purity of one's dirty work and that was by extending generous patronage to the church or mosque and employing artists to carry out this holy work. Genius, the divine gift, enhanced the intellectual value of that patronage, particularly in the Christian world. Money made through the instruments of trade and exchange could be used to engage artists, even those with the divine gift, architects and craftsmen, to raise houses of worship. It is in this sense of the "divinity" of the intellectually most exalted art that the artists themselves, the Raphaels and Michelangelos, began to be thought of as morally divine (even if their mundane existence was far from "holy") and removed from the vulgar trade that provided the money for their daily bread and the employment of their studio workmen. There was, as it were, a divine obfuscation of the social relationship between art and money.

As I point out in the first part of chapter 3, though genius and originality were the signs of the divine gift, there were seldom signs of the money that passed between artist and patrons, such as the church or state, or between dealers and patrons, either secular or divine. It was as if this social lubricant, the essential grease in the system, didn't exist.

It fell to the Pop artists of the 1960s in the United States to represent capital, to reveal both the system and the “grease.” Andy Warhol shocked the artworld by opening up a discourse on the power of money pulsing through the history of art, the museum, dealer and artists’ studio worlds of America. With Hefferton, Dowd and Lichtenstein, Warhol celebrated money as a visual symbol. As Dowd remarked:

Crammed into each bill is a whole array of impressive letters, numbers, and symbols. Indeed it’s a document of “signs” to guide the seeker to enduring faith in the system. What could be more persuasive or compelling than a document with the carefully selected contents: well chosen words supported by compelling pictures—[a] fun house of symbols, weighty symbols.<sup>3</sup>

It was both the system and the symbols it had developed over time that fascinated Pop artists: if in the Renaissance there was a need to highlight the moral value of the divine gift, to disguise the rude fact of art as part of a financial system, then the iconoclastic power of Pop was turned on the subject to reveal precisely that close bond. Moreover it was now possible to explore that system, through a long and complex history of symbols, through the use of decorated coins and carefully designed bills of exchange, that had once meant measuring the value of a product with a quantity of metal, but now, by the 1960s, through the proxies of cheap metal-like coins and paper that floated in realms of inflationary and deflationary values, like artworks themselves.

It is these realistic fictions, uncovered by Pop art, that have become more fantastic in the contemporary world, that are examined in three further chapters of this book.

Rebecca Hamid (chapter 7) is an art dealer who experienced the Wild West of the Neoliberal world of High Art both in an attempt to “brand,” to enhance the commercial value of her own gallery, and to promote the careers of two of her current stable of artists. She emphasises the financial divisions that exist within artworlds,<sup>4</sup> each a social, economic and political network linked to particular products. The less prestigious division, or what Terry Smith in his taxonomy of contemporary art calls a “current,”<sup>5</sup> is the local scene—provincial art, parochial, conservative, reassuring, undemanding, competent, cheap, appealing to the masses, with a short product life, more a backwater than a current: the national current flows within a mainstream of national history of art and culture, more radical, appealing to the middle class or aspiring intellectuals, affordable, with a place in the history of the local culture, and granted some degree of longevity: the strongest current is that of the global culture world of



“spectacular” art, flowing in the fast currents of the international superrich, a seeming avant-garde, very expensive, made by “branded” artists and their teams of assistants, making work too large for standard domestic consumption or smaller galleries, more suitable for mighty mansions and open air display, with a place in the event-driven culture of fashion and celebrity, seldom aspiring to any tangible intellectual value, a mega-Disneyland of art, managed by branded dealers at a few select sites of international significance, its place uncertain in the cultural future. Of course this crude division, in reality, is more complex and nuanced by Rebecca Hamid, but this frame conveys the grim reality of the international artworld for artists and dealers. It is a reality that is not new, that has always existed, if not in quite the gaudy vulgarity of the élite marketplace of tax-haven mega-wealth. Art practitioners and traders the world over and throughout history have always been in competition with one another: cultural circumstances dictating who will be favoured and who ignored, the grease lubricating the careers of some and its lack inhibiting the development of others. Artworlds are competitive, like all aspects of life. It is just that, in our world of instant communication, the communication of all and every intimate detail of trade and taste, it is so much more in your face and on the pages of the tabloids than in the slower and more restricted world of communications of the European Renaissance or of the diminishing number of ateliers in the rest of the world.

Shocked by her experience and that of her artists, Hamid goes on to posit an alternative, a subversive world of counter art, an alternative to the gross power, the spectacle and aesthetic vulgarity of the world of the superrich. This subversive world Terry Smith locates in the third or local “current,” but it more properly lies in the ruffled surface of the mainstream occasioned by passing wind gusts. Yet that counter action is replete with ironies: there is always the danger (?) that it may appeal to the superrich gallery and collector world, there to be consumed, ingested, to be spat out, reinvented as “spectacular avant-garde” and thus constrained by the very target of its attack, rendered impotent to subvert, artists losing control over the direction and momentum of their agency: there is also the more frequently experienced danger that it will be ignored, die in the frame, as it were, denied the attention it needs to be subversive in any effective way. The counteraction, in any case, will not receive the attention of the local or national artworlds, too caught up in their slipstreams, in the gossip of their own private agendas. So has subversion a chance? History doesn’t favour losers. Despite wishful thinking, such as Gene Ray’s models of resistance to global capital,<sup>6</sup> money and power tend to trickle up and never down!

Marx was right about cause and effect but his “beautifully failed project”<sup>7</sup> had no practical strategy to solve the “problems” for those trying to subvert the new High Art world.

In chapter 4 Laura Fisher traces the role of capitalism in the rise of Australian Aboriginal art from its national cultural obscurity before the 1980s to its current effulgence, outdazzling white Australian art in the global spectacle. What began as a government subvention to revive, economically and culturally, a people disenfranchised and marginalised through aggressive colonisation, became a multimillion dollar business in the hands of dealers with an eye to a marketable product, that created its own megastars exhibited around the world, their work selling for previously undreamed of sums. This is not to gainsay the very high standard of aesthetic sentiment attaching itself to the work of the megastars, but simply reinforces the very “problems” (if such they are) facing artists and their work from any culture—from Raphael to Kngwarreye—where “artistic innovations and unique poetic and conceptual content” become commercial commodities traded by dealers less concerned about aesthetic matters than with the money that can be made. “Money, as both a galvanising and destabilising force,” Fisher points out with a convincing degree of evidence, “has been fundamentally constitutive of Aboriginal art-making practices.” Despite the largely unarticulated original intentions, Australian Aboriginal art has not been free, almost from its re-emergence after decades of neglect, from the world of commerce, to reacquire within the Aboriginal world the indigenous aura it once possessed. Yet it would be foolish to dream that cultures can be “reinvented” to live a life outside of the commercial and political worlds of their natural existence. However much white Australia might want Reconciliation it cannot control the subsequent social momentum of a cultural revolution it sought to promote. White Australians whipped Aboriginals to the margins of colonial society and cannot expect them to return to the world as passive museum specimens. The experience of colonisation has made Aboriginals more savvy. Like the rest of us, they have to survive in the world as it is and not as it exists in the minds of well-meaning romantics. The art of the now has to make its way in the culture, political and economic, of the now. Aboriginals have been emancipated into capitalism. For many this may not seem like redemption, but it can be made to yield a living and return a degree of dignity.

Fisher deconstructs the complexities of the Australian Aboriginal artworlds. She discusses “the widely voiced hope that the Aboriginal art trade will improve Aboriginal people’s economic status, the degree to which the marked disparity between ‘white’ wealth and ‘black’ poverty

has been a focus of attention in critical engagements with Aboriginal art, the conviction that processes of commodification degrade Aboriginal culture and art, and the spectacularisation of the Aboriginal art market boom,” and sheds “some light on the interplay of utopian and dystopian ideas that have informed all of these formulations of Aboriginal art’s relationship with money.”

In chapter 5 Max Haiven, following Fredric Jameson, claims that capitalism is not simply commerce, “the ebb and flow of commodities and the exploitation of labour,” but creates a social “totality.” “Its economic components rely, ultimately, on political choices; these political choices in turn rely on a set of cultural meanings; these cultural meanings in turn rely on aesthetic conventions; and these conventions in turn rely on economic fundamentals” and that “all these dimensions are interconnected and inter-reliant, like a proverbial house of cards.”<sup>8</sup> The worlds of the Italian Renaissance and Aboriginal painting are part of political and economic systems, where there is a constant dialectical contestation of power, where nothing is static and forever, but is constantly being redefined and newly, but only temporarily, “understood.”

Within these historical totalities what is it to “represent?” Postmodern art is particularly concerned with this “crisis” of representation. Not only is this a case of the visual representation of things, but more significantly for us now the representation of ideas, particularly the idea of representation itself in all its many facets. Who is representing what and how and for what purpose? Art is an illusion, but so too, as I argue in the chapter on Pop art, and echoing Haiven, is the world of finance, of money, in which the commodity “art” is irremediably embroiled. The price of high-end global art often bears little relationship to its cultural value, that intangible “something” to which art seems to relate. Money, Haiven claims, seems to mismeasure, to misrepresent everything, including art. Perhaps this depends on what is being measured or represented. Certainly not “human life and happiness.” Money decidedly measures and represents accumulation, but, perhaps in some bizarre way, money also measures accurately things like hubris, the psychological imbalance of power, irresponsible action rather than reflection, and often in truly tragicomic ways. After all both Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons mock the capital that feeds them, yet the moneyed only ask for more abuse, as if they were suffering from some unconscious masochism of wealth.

Max Haiven, again following Jameson, repeatedly emphasises the fact that the sublime interdependency of the capitalist totality is beyond the representational scope of art except in part, such as my suggested masochism of wealth. Like Hamid he point to strategies available to the

worlds of art in the economic circumstances in which we find ourselves— firstly to give capitalism what it craves, like Hirst and Koons, or secondly “to use art to comment on and critique money’s social and political power.” Of course giving capitalism what it wants and critiquing the world of Mammon are often combined in a single artwork, such as many of the images of Andy Warhol, sometimes unwittingly, but often with tongue in cheek, salivating for the wealth such a critique will bring. Haiven castigates such artists: “the transformation of art into a speculative commodity presided over by a cadre of self-aware art superstars who see themselves not merely as ‘brands,’ but as financial impresarios.” He describes their work as “an alternative asset class,” “merely one element of larger financial portfolios, mobilised to counterbalance the risks and yields of other investments.”

Haiven points to a third strategy that “seeks to show that the value of money and the power of art are both the products of human cooperation and creativity,” both, perhaps, not unlike Burckhardt’s “fruits of reflection and adaptation.”

Unlike Hamid, Haiven put his faith not so much in subversion as in “art that draws specific attention to the deep affinity of art and money as forms of mediation,” adapting our creative energy both to demonstrate the hold money has over us as well as to question our enslavement to its magic. We try to stand back from the totality of capitalism, mock it, critique both it and our own enslavement, even challenge, in some unspecified way, that totality, without recognising that even this strategy is an essentially passive activity, blind to the need, if indeed need there is, to prepare for a revolution to topple capitalism itself, a concept which is a step too far, even for those who enjoy goading the hold of money and critiquing art’s complicity.

In chapter 8 Jewell Homad-Johnson seeks to direct our attention away from the razzamatazz of radical speculation and to return art to its seemingly rightful place in a spiritual world, outside the glare of High Global art or any critique of the capitalist totality. Homad-Johnson advocates a turn to the ideas of Kandinsky and the spiritual in art. Whilst following Hamid and Haiven in her analysis of the current state of the world’s art market and the hegemony of money, Homad-Johnson asks the very pertinent question: “What exactly is anyone paying for when these billions change hands?” Her answer is not Haiven’s “alternative asset class,” but that “*buying art offers the opportunity to buy what money can’t buy*” (her emphasis). That “what” is indeed one of the most interesting questions in art’s magical history and at the heart of various theories of aesthetics. Homad-Johnson develops her own explanation/theory, that,

following Lambert Wiesing, “there is in fact a presence in images—a worldly kind of present-ness.” It is the nature of that present-ness that it eludes language. It might, indeed, not be so much a “gift” of the work of art itself as a predisposition in the mind of the viewer, either singly or collectively, that finds a particular form of satisfaction, an inward pleasing gestalt, in some feature or form declared as “present-ness.” For want of any words, this is sometimes referred to as the very humanity, the sense of the “human spirit” in the work of art. For example Homad-Johnson offers the allure of the *Mona Lisa*, but perhaps it is in a collective sense that this painting, such as offered up by Walter Pater, brings pilgrims to the Louvre, or is this simply slick, or perhaps more generously, unconscious “branding?” It is this want of words for Wiesing’s “present-ness” that suggests, as David Zwirner is reported as saying, that “one of the reasons there’s so much talk about money is that it’s so much easier to talk about than the art.” So difficult is it in fact that Homad-Johnson closes her spirited defence with the example of Kandinsky with which she began and an aphorism from Fritz Lang that, with or without money, “*The Mediator Between Head and Hands Must Be the Heart.*”

It is certainly the heart that is on the sleeve of artist-run initiatives, as a form of opposition to the totalising of capitalism in the artworlds, that motivates the advocacy of Brendan Philip in chapter 9. Here is an example of a practice that tries to keep itself as far away from money as possible: “this refusal of definition and engagement with monetary concerns, however, should not be seen as a denial of something as much as the pursuit of an Other.” It is this Other with which Philip is chiefly concerned. Like Hamid, Haiven and Homad-Johnson, Philip admits the hegemony of global capitalism, and even the impossibility of direct confrontation with it, but finds some consolation in the Temporary Autonomous Zones identified by Peter Lamborn Wilson. “There is still no ‘outside’ of this system [of global capital], only spaces within the margins and stolen moments in the shadows, not where money is resisted but when it can be at best effectively ignored for however short a time...we are able to carve out spaces now and then, here and there, where creative practices can thrive on their own merits.” This a brave stance, standing up for freedom of creativity, with its back to the Wild West of the Neoliberal world of High Art as described by Rebecca Hamid. Philip asks his fellow followers of artist-initiatives “to look around ourselves, figure out what we want to do and to take the responsibility for doing it.”

In chapter 6 Leoni Schmidt examines the tensions between the educators/producers of artists and their financial patrons, in particular between contemporary institutions of art education and their funders. In

the distant past art had a central role in societies, in ritual, in celebration, in providing solace and distraction from the harsh necessities of survival, to provide, as Homad-Johnson would put it, spiritual nourishment. Small-scale societies satisfied this need locally, domestically. Only the collectivity could provide the capital to employ labour for the major works of architecture and precious ritual artworks. The artisans were not privileged. They were taught in workshops and died in poverty and without fame. Think of all the legions of Chinese ceramicists who contributed to the few fine wares enjoyed by Emperors and scholar-scribes or the nameless monks at work for a lifetime in the scriptoria. They were “funded,” if that’s not too grand a word, by institutions at a rate considered appropriate to their specific role within the economic scheme of things. Since the Italian Renaissance in the West, and even more so since the emergence of Modernism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as Schmidt points out, artists are trained, at first in the few academies and now in the vastly proliferated number of art schools, to be autonomous creators without a clear social role or set of obligations within established social practices. This creates a tension between those who guard the purse strings on behalf of capitalism and those who ask to be funded to train those who will often be at the forefront of criticism of that very capitalist establishment—both are somewhat confounded and confused, as the discussion on Koons and Damien Hirst above made clear. Yet it is also true, as Schmidt claims, that it is artists—in the broadest sense of the word—who push the boundaries of thought, of conceptualisation, of our examination and assessment of human life on this small planet hurtling through space. We need such people, it is claimed. This role as thinker, observer, of commentator, of critic, even entertainer, can be described as modern artists’ social utility. Yet when they make their claim, their training paid for out of the public purse, society is apt to marginalise their value, even reject them and cast them out like pariahs—unless they learn to play at the capitalist game, as Hamid found out. This chapter raises issues about art training, art practice and social utility, which are far from being resolved in the minds of theorists, in the practice and self-evaluation of artists or by the market place.

Given the generally held opinion of the present situation in the worlds of art in the social totality of global capitalism, it is indeed salutary to read the variety of strategies of artists to retain their integrity as autonomous creators, seeking the holy grails of “present-ness,” originality, aura, social utility or simply self-determination. One outstanding example was the quixotic heroism of Kazimir Malevich in 1917-21. Malevich backed the Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917-18, the only political event, in the

history of capitalism's triumphal march to hegemony, to seek its replacement by a form of social collectivity. Malevich briefly advocated the destruction of all museums and collections of art in order for human beings to start their visual creativity anew, the visual as enlightened speculation, like Walter Benjamin after 1924 "committing himself wholeheartedly to a revolutionary liquidation of cultural tradition in the name of a democratic future."<sup>9</sup> Malevich's Suprematism was envisioned as the vanguard of that renewal, where art would no longer act as a mirror to the political, social and economic power of specific cultures, but as the creative think tank of a new, finally enlightened age. Malevich's ideas make the "strategies" of our own day seem like fiddling whilst true freedom burns.<sup>10</sup> Yet of course Suprematism and Malevich failed, as Bolshevism failed, within four years of October 1917. The forces ranged against them, both within and without the new Russia, both on the so-called Left and the Right of the political spectrum, were too strong. And not only that, it may be argued, human nature had so accustomed itself to both money and the conventions of the bourgeoisie, that Malevich's ideas were treated as a form of madness. An extreme neo-liberalism was eventually victorious in the post-Soviet Russian Federation to which art has played the pander, as it had done to "Communism" in the past.

As if to bring art history back, from the dizzy heights of theoretical speculation and the splenetic diabolism of global capitalism, to the quieter realm of a more traditional close documentation, evidence, upon which, after all, all speculation must have its foundation, Mark Stocker, in chapter 10, explores the relationship between coinage and national identity in New Zealand. Stocker turns his spotlight on the very objecthood of coinage, not with the mockery of Dowd, Hefferton and Lichtenstein, nor the celebratory bravado of Warhol, but in the way decisions about images on coins charted the way a nation instantiated itself, bore witness to its selfhood, particularly when emerging from the womb of empire into the self-determination of "dominion." It is salutary in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to be reminded how recent such history is and how transient the moments of such self-consciousness are, indeed to see art and design as within the flow of time, subject to the constancies of change, so that what seems set for ever, like Empire, is but a moment in a never ending process. Even coinage itself, with its own long history, will soon seem uniquely quaint and collectable, as money becomes a thing of swipes and internet banking. Coinage as object has always been a commodity of exchange, but the validity of the face value is soon changed to the market value of the collectable when demonetised and withdrawn from circulation to become heritage. As numismatic catalogues make clear, coins are also artworks,

their designers often well-known artists. The price put on a coin that is no longer in legal tender depends not only upon rarity value but also aesthetic merit. These sentiments combine in the market place such that a Tudor gold sovereign of the reign of Henry VIII will cost you over £120,000!

Stocker's chapter sidesteps the vulgar issues that preoccupy the minds of other contributors to examine in some detail the issue of the self-awareness of a nation through its freedom to design and mint its own currency. New Zealand was the last of the British dominions to do so, from 1933, with British coins no longer legal tender from 1935. Despite this freedom the designs for the first New Zealand coins were commissioned from two British artists—Kruger Gray, who designed coins for a whole swathe of colonies and dependencies in the Empire, and Percy Metcalfe. Both used books depicting the flora and fauna of New Zealand, without any first-hand experience of the former colony. It was not until 1940 that New Zealand-based designers, nearly all of whom had their initial training in Great Britain, had a hand in the production of New Zealand money. Artists making money: whoever said the two concepts were antithetical!

## Notes

1. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy*, 1st publ. 1860 (London: Penguin Books, 1990) 73.
2. Burckhardt:1990, 69.
3. Excerpt from *Robert Dowd: Pop Art Money*, a catalogue essay by Michael Zakian for the Weisman Museum exhibition, 2009.  
<<http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/8aa/8aa402.htm>> (accessed 7 November 2014).
4. The term "artworld" was first elaborated in philosophical terms by Arthur Danto—"The Art World," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 61:19 (1964) and George Dickie—*Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), and in sociological terms, by Howard Becker—*Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).
5. Terry Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
6. Such as Gene Ray, "Another (Art) World is Possible: Theorising Oppositional Convergence," *Third Text*, 18:6 (2004) 565-72
7. See Max Haiven, 59 in this book.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Adam Kirsch, "The Redemption of Walter Benjamin," *New York Review of Books*, 10 July 2014, 36.
10. For a sample of Malevich's extreme position see chapter 5, "The End of Painting: From White Suprematism to 'Blank Canvas,'" in Aleksandra Shatskikh's *Black Square: Malevich and The Origin of Suprematism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012) 251-71.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE INVISIBLE COIN IN MASACCIO'S *TRIBUTE MONEY*

ESTELLE ALMA MARÉ

**T**ommaso Cassai, called Masaccio (1401-28), was one of the great fresco painters of the early Italian Renaissance. He was a pupil of Marriotto di Christofano (ca. 1395-1457) in Florence, where he befriended other artists, such as Masolino da Panicale (ca. 1383- ca.1447)<sup>1</sup> with whom he collaborated, the architect Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446) and the sculptor Donato Donatello (ca. 1386-1466).

In the Brancacci Chapel in Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence, Masaccio painted a cycle of Biblical events, among which the panel referred to as the *Tribute Money* (1426-7) is in a section dedicated to Peter, Jesus's closest disciple.<sup>2</sup>



Fig. 1-1. Masaccio, *Payment of the Tribute Money*, Capella Brancacci, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence, 1426-7, fresco, 247 x 597 cm.

Formally this fresco is lauded for its innovative perspectival composition, masterful illusionism based on the imitation of natural forms, the three-dimensionality of the figures, the artist's knowledge of antique figural composition and his revival of a traditional narrative genre.<sup>3</sup>

The theme of the *Tribute Money* refers to the arrival of Jesus and his disciples during the time of the Passover in Capernaum at Peter's home, which is depicted behind the figures to the right of the picture. According to *The Gospel According to Matthew* (17:27), when accosted by the tax collector, who was not a Roman, but a Jew representing the priestly order, for His and Peter's payment of the Jewish temple tax, Jesus understood that the tax collector knew that He was not a rabbi and therefore not exempt from the tax; also Peter was older than the other disciples and therefore eligible for payment. Consequently Jesus instructs Peter, who was a fisherman, as follows:

But so that we may not cause offence, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours. (New International Version of the Bible)

In the picture different events involving the same persons take place in a uniform pictorial space. In this kind of composition, which was popular in medieval art, the narrative device is referred to as "continuous action,"<sup>4</sup> "continuous narrative," or depictions of "simultaneous succession," since various phases of an event series are presented simultaneously within a single spatial setting. Accordingly, in the *Tribute Money* the figure of Peter is shown three times in different attitudes in the same pictorial space. He is present in the central group, confronted by the back-turned tax collector; at the left he crouches in the act of catching a fish, and to the right of the picture he hands the coin retrieved from the fish's mouth to the tax collector. With this gesture Peter's third and the tax collector's second appearance concludes the narrative.

### **Extra-pictorial references**

The tribute money theme of Masaccio's fresco may have struck a chord with contemporary Florentines, not only as a didactic religious picture, but also as a veiled reference to the current controversy in their city concerning the proposed tax to cover the cost of their lost battle against Milan during the years 1422-7.<sup>5</sup> Citizens who possessed property to the value of one hundred florins had to pay half a florin as a point-five percentage tax, considered to be an arbitrary imposition that evoked a

furious reaction. The matter was finally settled in 1427 with the institution of an official tax register that allowed for a fairer system of taxation in the city. Masaccio, the young Florentine painter, reacted to the proposed tax by choosing to represent a New Testament event that referred to taxation, but had never before been depicted in art.

Modern viewers may, however, find the parallel between the Florentine resistance against the imposition of a new tax and the demand of payment from Jesus and Peter rather strained. From Matthew 17:24 one gathers that the tax collector was suspicious that Jesus might evade payment of the obligatory tax, since Jesus was not an ordained rabbi and consequently not exempt from the temple tax. In order not to offend the religious authorities that tried to catch Him taking liberties with the law, Jesus was willing to pay up. For that purpose he worked a miracle by creating the four-drachma coin that Peter retrieved from the fish's mouth.

In order to establish what kind of coin Peter hands to the tax collector, but that remains invisible in Masaccio's depiction, references to historical sources are necessary.

### **The temple tax and coinage appropriate for payment**

In the wilderness, during the Exodus from Egypt, Moses, the leader of the Jewish tribe, established that "Each one who crosses over to those already counted is to give half a shekel, according to the sanctuary shekel, which weighs twenty gerahs. This half a shekel is an offering to the LORD" (Exodus 30:11-16). A "gerah" is an ancient Hebrew unit of weight and currency, equivalent to one-twentieth of a shekel, weighing 0.568 grammes.

When the temple in Jerusalem, also referred to as Herod's temple, was inaugurated, temple tax was imposed to provide for its maintenance, daily sacrifices, and expenses for oil, priestly robes, fuel, incense, water, and so on. Every male over the age of twenty was required to give half a shekel, a coin of pure silver that weighed a half-ounce. In the currency of that time it was worth about two drachma, the equivalent of two days' wages.

The shekel of Tyre was a new coin, renowned throughout the ancient world for the quality of its silver, and as such became the standard currency for international transactions. This coin continued to bear the Egyptian eagle on reverse when the portrait face was changed to that of Tyre's supreme god, Bal-Melkart (or Melquarth), who was considered by the Greeks and Romans to be Hercules. Notwithstanding its pagan iconography this shekel was the accepted coin for payment of the temple

tax and the thirty silver coins that Judas received as payment for betraying Jesus (Matthew 26:14-16) may also have been shekels.

No drachma coin existed at the time of Jesus. Templegoers paid the tribute money with a stater, the equivalent of four drachma or two shekels, required for two persons. The stater was a Greek or Tyrian coin that could also be used to pay the temple tax for two persons. It was minted at Antioch, at Caesarea in Cappadocia, and in Tyre.

By Jesus's time toll booths were set up in places outside Jerusalem a month before Passover, that is from the fifteenth of March, to pre-empt payment of the required tax. According to this arrangement the tax could be paid in advance in various towns, but after a certain date it had to be paid at the temple. Therefore, it may have been that upon entering Capernaum Jesus and his disciples came to such a tollbooth, a detail omitted in Masaccio's depiction. The setting of the *Tribute Money* is outside Peter's house where the tax collector seems to operate without an official venue.

## **Money changers and the temple in Jerusalem**

In Jesus's time all kinds of currencies were in use, all of them more or less equally valid for usual business purposes in Palestine. However, Roman tax had to be paid in Roman currency and the temple tax had to be paid in Jewish currency.<sup>6</sup>

At Passover as many as a million pilgrims visited the temple in Jerusalem, most of whom had to convert the currency they carried to pay for offerings. To facilitate the conversion of unacceptable currency carried by visitors from all over the Roman Empire to appropriate coins accepted by temple authorities, money changers installed their banking tables in the temple's Court of the Gentiles. These unscrupulous dealers charged a hefty fee for their service and made an unseemly profit. Their unethical practice had become so pernicious that on the occasion of a temple visit during his early ministry, as well as a second time after that, Jesus is said to have overturned their tables (Mark 11:15-17; Matthew 21:12-13). Jesus accused the usurers of turning the "house of prayer" into a marketplace and violently drove them out. The temple had indeed, in some sense, become the Jewish national bank as well as a public treasury containing vast stores of private wealth.