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## Market Value Analysis of Takashi Murakami's Artwork Under Howard Becker's theory

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**Market Value Analysis of Takashi Murakami's  
Artwork Under Howard Becker's theory**

**by**

**Liu Yi-Ding**

**A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements  
for the Master's Degree in Sotheby's Institute of Art**

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**14,942 words**

## ABSTRACT

This paper is an analysis about the artist Takashi Murakami. As a representative of the corporate artist, he is favored by the Art business world while being criticized by many people. This paper adopts American sociologist Howard Becker's art world theory as a research tool to observe that the construction of Murakami and his art market is not the growth of genius, but the result of collective cooperation. Based on two decades of data on the art trade, Murakami has made his unique brand of ultra-flat theory and otaku work. These labels, along with internalization and external marketing, eventually gave Murakami a dual identity in the eastern and western world. Mr. Murakami, who has held the Geisai fair since 2002 and founded Kaikai Kiki in 2006, has injected new blood to the art world by breaking the rules while adhering to them. Every step of his art has been delicately designed, which shows that the process of artistic transformation is not achieved overnight but gradually constructed and stabilized.

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## INTRODUCTION

Takashi Murakami is one of the Japanese artists who attracts worldwide attention. His unique innovation combines the traditional Japanese art style with western art concepts. Murakami started his career as a solo artist since 1989. Also, during this year, his art focus started to shift to New York City. There, after Murakami experienced some period of a tough time, he absorbed more incredible ideas and cultural elements, which helped shape his special artistic vision. (Artsy)

Murakami is also the most active Japanese artists working today. One of the most remarkable contributions of Murakami was the foundation of a postmodern art movement named “Superflat”. This new term presented the artist’s idea of creating a concept for his theory of a new form emerging from the innovative expressions existed in Manga (graphic novels), video games, Japanese anime, fashion, and graphic design. (Fox, 2018) After Takashi Murakami launched this influential movement, many other gifted artists followed his step and made this anime-inspired style popular all over the world.

Takashi Murakami’s name is always connected with the contemporary pop artist, Andy Warhol. He is also recognized as the icon of Japanese Neo-pop art “the Warhol Japan”. His influence on Japan rivals Andy Warhol’s in the United States. (The Board) Inspired by Warhol’s idea of setting up a collective art workshop named the Factory, Murakami founded the Hiropon Factory, which is known as Kaikai Kiki

Corporation today. After the establishment of the workshop, Murakami's anime-inspired art pieces soon attracted the attention of American collectors. His pieces appeared in the major auction houses in the United States such as Christie's, Sotheby's and Phillips de Pury & Company. His success also promotes the development of Japanese Neo-pop culture in the Western market.

Since the publication of the essayist Howard Becker's book "Art Worlds" in 1982, various language versions have emerged throughout the world. The core concept of the art world theory is: "Art is not a particularly talented individual work. In contrast, art is a product of collective activity and a product of many people moving together. These people have different skills and talents, from Different backgrounds belong to different professional groups."(Becker,1982) From this elaboration, Becker's focus can be summarized as two words, "collectives". The second core point of the art world theory revolves around a problem. How does the "collective" work? "How these people succeeded in coordinating their work, thus completing the final work, and ultimately the work succeeded in producing the desired effect in one way or another." Becker's use of collective action in the art world A word to sum up - "Convention." Becker believes that his theory is formed from three directions. The first is the introduction of the "Joint Action" by the sociologist Blumer, who uses it in the collective action of the art world. In operation, it became part of its own theory; the second is: "comparative" research between cases.

Becker is an empiricist sociologist. This stems from his extensive field work with the mentor Hughes during his student days. He collects data and analyzes them,



linking the cases together and comparing them. Becker believes: "Putting two or more such cases together allows you to see the same phenomenon - the same form of collective activity, the same process - how different in different places Forms, those differences depend on what, and how their results differ." The third source of the theory of the art world is the reflection of the "Progress". Becker believes that the development of anything is not done overnight, things are done according to the procedures they should, some are dominant and some are invisible, and never stop.

The formation of the art world has gone through a process of time, so the art world is based on historical cognition. Compared with the past, the theory of the art world regards collective organization as the core of research. To a certain extent, it is anti-genius theory. It is believed that the emergence of artists and the emergence of famous works are the result of the collective promotion of the whole art world.

In general, Takashi Murakami views art history in a rather deconstructive perspective: art does not have to just the results of creation, but also a tool to impress the market and accuracy the mess. From his point of view, an artist's job is to leave a personal trace on the context of art history and let the price prove the depth of the trace. The strong interaction between Murakami and the others and the market reminds people of Becker's theories on art worlds. This chapter conducts an in-depth analysis of Murakami's works from Becker's theory.

# 1. The Influence

## 1.1 Japanese Art as Part of the Global Market

In Japan, after World War II, Japan accelerated its integration with Western culture, and local artists began to explore their traditional culture in response and as part of efforts at seeking a clearer identity. Designers began to try to use traditional culture as the foundation to learn the essence of Western modern trends and create their own contemporary works of art. However, as life becomes more complex and consumers more affluent, consumption expands, and aesthetics become more generalized, the Japanese art world began to be filled with noisy, vulgar visual symbols. In an idealized past contrasting to this cosmopolitan and commercialized present, art was once pure and sublime, and not be contaminated by any crass commercialism. Artwork in this vein, possessing the most precious of all resources, authenticity, must then be accompanied by an enormous price of collection (Murakami, 2005). In modern Japanese society, artists must settle down and make their works satisfy the tastes of the masses, leading consumer culture and fashion trends. The “commercialization” of art works has become the central trend and requirement of the times, necessary for an artist to survive and thrive, and to stay relevant in a society where commercialism is essentially ubiquitous. Tracing back the history of contemporary art in Japan, it is not difficult to find that there is always such a warrior who dares to break the stereotypes, who dares to break through and innovate, and is

highly effective at following the pulse of the times. Murakami is one such Japanese "fashion art talent".

Japanese Neo-Pop artists have made great achievements in recent years. In 2004, Aya Takano sold her first work Television Telephone for \$3,500 at Phillips de Pury & Company, New York. Iwamoto Masakatu, known as Mr., has also sold his pieces in New York and London. His acrylic Green Girl went under the hammer for \$8,000.(Artprice) Hiro Ando uses his plastic language to expand the international market. The current estimated price of his works is from \$6,000 to \$67,000.(Invaluable.com) In addition, neo-pop artists like Hiro Ando also followed the business model of Takashi Murakami's: He is the co-founder of a collective studio of several artists named CrazyNoodles. It spread between Tokyo, Paris, and Beijing, who share a youthful Pop aesthetic steeped in manga and Japanese contemporary culture. (Artsy) Today, there has been a Japanese enthusiasm in the world market.

As part of the growing global market for Japanese art, it has greatly increased the artist's awareness of self-expression and the potential global interest in Japanese cultural themes. Murakami's work is a very interesting example in this regard. He manipulates the symbols of popular culture with incredible skill, making them clear and accessible to the eyes of international audiences. Murakami successfully managed the market reaction and gained an advantage, and he took a lot of material from Japanese otaku culture, reflecting the need to use the "Japanese sex" element to please the global audience. This reveals that although Japanese contemporary art is already on the radar of the global market. If it is to continue to thrive, it must present its own

inherently and distinctively Japanese characteristics. This may be a natural thing for the international audience, but when one reflects on this, it is easy to find structural problems and contradictions in terms of artistic qualities and cultural elements. For example, an American artist, no one will deliberately look for unique Americanism in their works, or overly reflect on them. Even highly familiar cultural elements can never be used as a main artistic language for understanding or expressing a work (Lin, 2014). In contrast, the understanding of Japanese contemporary art (one can also refer to any non-Western contemporary art genre on this issue) is still too simplistic, and is often based on national cultural frameworks. Therefore, Murakami's success in the global market is extremely ironic. He deliberately and skillfully utilized the cultural market to expose the cruel logic behind the art market, stripping away much of the pretense of the art world. Murakami's dramatic self-promotion is like one of dance macabre, moving toward death, and death by the merciless logic of the market is always an important element in the game of survival in the art world.

This is reminiscent of a broader topic: the treatment of Japanese artists inside and outside Japan. Of course, many Japanese artists such as Nakinishi Natsuyuki, Tochigi Chisong, and Okazaki Kanjiro have been identified by contemporary artists or critics as equally important and influential as Murakami. But at the same time, these artists are not as internationally favored as Murakami (at least to date). The reason why these other artists have not received their due attention and favor from the market and the public was because they were extremely cautious about joining the market-led art world, trying to find a critical and distanced position in the powerful

and inclusive flood of globalization. These less prominent artists are usually highly theoretical thinkers who resist the global art market's insistence on finding traces of "Japanese nature" in their works.

All in all, whether one examines modern art, post-modern art, or contemporary art, it rotates through genres of avant-garde, fashionable, marketable, pluralistic, and popular novel trends and phases. All art genres are characterized by the nature of innovation and the promotion of the trends of the times. Amidst the historical torrents of artistic development, the continuous socialization and publication of art also creates new mainstream cultures and spawns' new subcultures and trends. But for the collections of merchants and investors, the intrinsic value of art may be judged as being less important. The focus of their concern is whether it is profitable is, so it is transformed into a purely economic activity. Through a large number of acquisitions and speculations, the accumulation and volume of artworks has also created a huge art market. When the art market become the best promoter of art fairs, and a truly global market of goods, communities, and ideas have formed, art fairs from all over the world have come out one after another (Mun-Delsalle, 2016). Thousands of works and emerging artists have come to prominence here, creating amazing sessions and staggering transaction volumes. The cultural connotation and the exchange of art fairs have caused many artistic concepts to rub and collide with one another, creating new sparks, and have produced more artistic creations characterized by "temporality", "breakthroughs", and even more "subversiveness". New subcultural styles will also be

born, and these mainstream and non-mainstream impacts will once again form new artistic trends.

## **1.2 Art as a Social Construction, Establishment of New Art Mechanisms**

Becker's theory of art worlds systematically presents three core questions: What is art? Who created art? How to create art? Focused on these three core issues, in his book Becker was devoted to explaining why artists produce specific works in a specific way in a specific time and space, and why these works are specific in a specific time and space using special way to gain reputation. On the basis of understanding Becker's theory of art, the author tried to use Murakami's artwork as the subject to explain the differences in traditional perspectives, problems, and methods between traditional aesthetics or art philosophy and art sociology. First of all, compared with the metaphysical philosophy of art, the methods and perspectives of art research, the study of empirical (art) sociology pays more attention to the form of art and the content of art. It is more about art as a social phenomenon. Using art as a materialized product, the practice of artist creation is a product of socialization in a specific social context. In other words, art sociology regards art as a social fact and advocates a value-neutral experience-positive study. In contrast, art philosophy places more emphasis on the super-historical and eternal nature of art, emphasizing the commonality that art should have as a general and universal concept.

Secondly, art sociology is concerned with the reasons for his creation in a specific context as an artist in a collective social context. What are the social

conditions, social concepts and social psychology covered in this particular situation. The concern is no longer a lonely, unique artist, but more about the role of the artist in the collective network of social interaction. The artist is one of the participants in the art world. It also includes patrons, distributors, critics, exhibition planners, curators of museums and galleries, and salesmen, etc.

Furthermore, with regard to the conditions of artistic creation, Becker proposed at least four essential conditions: the material media of artistic production, the practices and norms of the art world, the art patrons and the art market, and the interest and acceptance habits of the art public. His analysis of the four conditions is completely (consistent) with the French scholar Bourdieu's empirical sociological perspective. The difference is that he embeds the perspective of symbolic interaction into the process of analyzing art, giving people a kind of Not the same feeling. It should be said that Becker based on his own unique (experiential sociology) perspective, symbolic interaction theory and field observation experience, in the context of making full use of the specific sociological culture, and extending his mastery of sociological theory into art research, People have a new look and have a profound impact.

Nowadays, the public position of art is becoming weaker and weaker, and is gradually becoming more polarized: part of this process is becoming more and more based in "feelings" and losing its function of spiritual guidance; part of this becomes a product of an elite group working behind closed doors. The key to avoiding both the vulgarization of art and the exclusivity of the ivory tower is to adhere to the artistic

interest of noble spiritual exploration and to exert the magical power of art. Murakami's business model is worth learning, but he confuses art and art products, causing the latter to dispel the exploratory value of the former. It is advisable to establish new art mechanisms for the separation of artistic creation and the artistic operation mechanisms of Murakami Takashi. Art creation must have a certain degree of spiritual interest, or a tool for social guidance, or a result of philosophical thinking. Art is different from commodities and decorations. It offers incomparable spiritual guidance and emotional intervention capacity, and should be responsible for the promotion of human progress and social development. The rise from materialism to spiritualism is the direction that art can follow as a high-level existence. Therefore, the depth of the artwork's idea becomes the value of art.

Art operation mechanisms assist in the dissemination of artistic ideas. We can create artistic alternatives that convey artistic ideas, rather than simply copying and modifying these ideas. Art goods can be used as decorations to enhance the cultural content of people's living environment. They can also express the spiritual interests of the owners, assist in the mass communication of artistic ideas and influence on people's values. New art production mechanisms not only produce new artistic creation concepts and aesthetic ideas, but also generates artists who are compatible with this mechanism, or the consciousness of the subject. This kind of consciousness permeates all aspects of creation and runs through the entire act of creation. Sprenkle, Blow, and Dickey argues that the "relationship attributes" of social life between works of art is unique in that it gives "cultural identity" to a work of art, especially an



otherwise abstract work of art (Sprenkle, Blow, & Dickey, 1999). That is to say, the "institutional" environment in which social activity and inspiration exists as a work of art. This not only affects the meaning of the work, but also determines the whole process of the production, acceptance, and understanding of art, and determines the basis for establishing the value of art. From this perspective, art is analyzed as a special cultural product rather than an aesthetic object devoid and free of any cultural context. In a sense, the interpretation of artistic creation activities is the establishment of its "cultural identity." Therefore, the critics' "interpretative" discourse on artistic phenomena must be within the perspective of the "art world" to have any sort of validity or practical applications, particularly given the role of self-declared and formally educated professional experts and specialists in the field of professional art criticism.

Under this new model, any and all art products, whether produced by either commercial or purely academic or intellectual art creation processes, should be regarded as art. The key is the concept of "business"; art must ultimately be a product, and cannot be bought and sold without it. Takashi Murakami believes that the art business model he established can simultaneously enhance the value of both art goods and artworks, but his so-called "offence" provided to traditional values has caused some controversy-some people think that although he is possessed of unique creativity, his ignorance of the purity of artistic ontology has abandoned the sublime aesthetic of art. In any case, this type of cartoon art, pop art, or game art is the result of the joint efforts of all the art circles, and one of the most popular concepts in

among the emergent community of art collectors is an interest in all types of aesthetics and national cultures.

## **2. Art as Collective Action: Are Artists Independent?**

### **2.1 Artists' Relationship with Others**

Traditional analysis of art is often limited to artists and works of art, while Becker examines art from a sociological perspective, seeing art as a collective activity, and enriching and subtly elucidating the concept of “art world” by performing analysis from that dimension. In Becker's view, the art world is often inextricably linked to the world in which it tries to draw a line between the two, the concept of a world of “art” and “non-art”. This theory was originally used to analyze the phenomena of Western modern art, but the art world theory, as a cultural research method with a humanistic dimension, focuses on the complex, multi-dimensional architecture of art ontology, and art forms in social historical and cultural contexts. These laws of development are universal (Bottero, 2009). Therefore, the specific cultural context of western artists, and the artist's subjective consciousness, are similar to those of oriental aesthetics. In particular, with the transformation of Eastern and Western aesthetics into modern times and with significantly greater global integration, both the characteristics of artwork itself and the practical environment in which the art exists have entered a broader social text (Crossley, 2010). To Becker, art is no longer considered as a highly individualized creation, but a social process. He believes that art shall not be seen as works that created by some particularly gifted individuals. On the contrary, art

is more like a product of collective actions, which means the process of creating art involves many people working together. What Becker provided us is a total new perspective in the development of art: it is the logic of collective action that allows certain pieces of work called art and it is the convention in of the art worlds that breeds a great artist or an influential art genre.

Takashi Murakami has elaborated several examples of collective collaboration in his theory of art and entrepreneurship. He believes that not only works of art, but also all other related auxiliary links around them are also critical to the final effect. The first is about translation issues, such as Japanese otaku cultur. In the Asian context, most viewers can empathize and know what the artist is expressing. But if you move to Europe or the United States, there will be multiple communication barriers, at which time translation becomes crucial. Murakami once said: If you want to challenge the world, you should be aware of whether the meaning of the work is conveyed in the context of the Western world. If formal understanding is required, it is obvious that investment in translation is required regardless of art or entertainment. In cultures like manga and cartoon, if the background of the work is not translated well, the level of understanding can only stay on the surface. If you want to show art to the whole world, you should not just stay in the production process of the work, but also work hard on the details around the work so that the audience can enjoy the rendering of the entire environment. (Murakami, 2011). The above examples particularly illustrate the issues that artists from Asia or the non-Western world should pay attention to when changing contexts. Art is the result of many aspects, and

contemporary art in particular requires more and more detailed preparations to be close to perfection. The process of visual art is particularly like the rehearsal process of a symphony. Each voice, each instrument, is intertwined under the direction of a conductor to complete the entire work in an orderly manner. Takashi Murakami is the conductor and composer. He not only creates works but also organizes performances, keeping the most authoritative version firmly within the scope of his team's operations. These all coincide with the collective collaboration in Becker's theory of the art world.

Murakami and Nara's art agent, Yosemite, have pointed out that the works of the two artists in his personal gallery had only sold about 300,000 yen a decade ago, when the subculture style was not favored among collectors. At present, these items sold at their auction venue for tens of millions of yen, showing a one-hundred-time increase over their price ten years ago. These examples are actually just the tip of the iceberg. The three elements of the art market industry (even could be called the "Golden Triangle") are the output value created by art creators, galleries and auction houses or collectors. As Becker pointed out, art is a collective action because it is not a single creation of one artistic but a group activity of the artist and other people that are involved. In the production, distribution, and consumption of creating and promoting art, many roles are involved in the process, from the media inventors and resource suppliers in the production process, to the gallery owners and auction house managers in the distribution process, to the critics and the general audience belong to consumer segment, as well as sponsorship by national governments and art

foundations, etc.

The artist's work is usually commissioned by the gallery, and the gallery operator has the right to determine the price of the art. In addition to the artists, who have the experience of attending exhibitions and determining market prices, the price of most mainstream artworks is usually determined after the exhibition. The artist makes a decision on the auction, and the gallery operator will develop a suitable price after evaluating the sales effect on the economic side. When collecting works of art, money is of course indispensable, but the most important thing is the establishment of basic platforms. That is, artwork must be considered to be elegant by the cultural standards of collectors and be considered acceptable and exclusive; most contemporary art will stand out when they first appear, and this is part of the motivation of producing modern art and a necessary condition. Innovation is required as part of market experimentation, and novelty is ultimately the most important element of art, even more than being fashionable or trendy. There must be a balance of making the artwork "understandable" and "unintelligible", so the question of how to make new art styles survive in the art market, and is an ultimate test of the demonstrator's skills. In the book "Contemporary Art Business Opportunities" by Tomio, the author noted that Murakami, who was attending the exhibition, offered to greet him. His second sentence was: "Please introduce the media to me. Let's go!" (Tomio, 2013). She bluntly said that Takashi Murakami often thought about how to use the media to introduce his work to the world. He didn't just want to create; after completing a work, he thought about how to display and introduce it, how to shape

their impression of the work, he has been constantly thinking about the subject. No matter how beautiful the creation is, the style must always be unique. If an artwork is not recognized and displayed by the agents and collectors, its value will not be revealed, and a masterpiece will be no difference from a promising student work.

Truly heavy weight artwork is bound to accumulate in value over a considerable period of time. This includes both internal and external dimensions: first, the artistic realm and public connotation of the artist himself; and second, the perception, observation, and acceptance of the artist by the outside world. This provides a long-term basis for market accumulation (Zhang & Hong, 2015). Collectors have always played a role in responding to artistic trends in the art market. Whether the art style is new or old, the artist's fame or not, it must be interpreted to a considerable extent by the public. Whether it is conducted out of pure love, appreciation of art, or for other motives, a consumer base must grow, the art world will change with the buyer's collection, and the artwork is affected by the collector's wide range of tastes, a range that is constantly expanding and shifting, and which is increasingly eclectic and global, and constantly shifting into more controversial or innovative territories.

## 2.2 The Distribution System

When a piece of artwork is produced by the collectively efforts of the art worlds, it needs to find a distribution system that provides channels for people with taste and appreciation to reward the time, money and energy invested by the artist in the work. The art distribution system has an intermediary function between the artist and the public, relying mainly on specialized middlemen. The distribution of art by

middlemen will directly affect the channels of art and the reputation of artists. Artists will treat those who are familiar with art conventions as partners in the production of art. Like the social production of art, the art world often has multiple distribution systems running at the same time. Becker focused on three distribution systems: self-sufficiency, sponsorship, and public sales. Murakami's work follows a distribution system for public sales. The system follows the market principle of free trading, and the basic operation is as follows: (1) the actual demand is caused by people who will spend money to buy art; (2) they need the art that they will appreciate and love in education and experience. (3) The price of art varies with the demand and quantity; (4) This system deals with works that can be effectively distributed without affecting its own operation; (5) enough artists will make the system Works that can be effectively distributed to keep the system running; (6) If the artist's work is not or will not be dealt with by the distribution system, they will look for other ways of distribution.

The example of Takashi Murakami's cross-border cooperation not only shows his artistic talents, but also extends his works to a wide range of commercial fields, and has achieved good results in the sales of luxury goods. Takashi Murakami's art distribution system is different from other artists. He is open to the public. Murakami's commercial success has also led to his sales in the primary and secondary art markets. In 2000, LV design director Marco Jacques invited Takashi Murakami to cooperate with the original use of floret, mushroom, cherry or colorful patterns on the classic Monogram series. The launch of cherry bags and other styles has triggered a

wave of snapping for consumers and also led the market. The trend of cross-border cooperation with artists. LV's leather bag products replaced the traditional three-color printing with dozens of bright colors, making the traditional impression of steady and elegant become young and colorful. The limited edition "Eye Love Monogram" series uses classic cute eyes. For this series, Takashi Murakami also specially designed new window and animation "SuperFlat Monogram" for LV. In the display window and in the animation content, it is so cute that people fall into a fairy tale world full of imagination. "In the process of working with LV, I realized how hard it is to call a brand business. A group of elites want to deal with all kinds of people full of desires, do business with them, and then make most people happy. What a terrible thing. "Murakami said that, but with the western curiosity about Japanese culture and his own sensitivity to Japanese society and culture, Murakami took the opportunity in fashion culture to create a fashion trend. Takashi Murakami has found a bridge of communication between elite culture and popular culture, animation and fashion boutiques, and the West and the East, creating a more inclusive modern aesthetic concept. Although the commercial behavior of artists and brands has been criticized, it is undeniable that the cherry blossom bag has driven many women into madness, and according to the New York Times, it has even created hundreds of millions of dollars for LV.

In this more complex and sophisticated distribution system, art is regarded as an important investment object, the price of art is determined by the relationship between supply and demand, and the distribution system is operated by a specialized



intermediary. The artist is responsible for the production of publicly distributed works of art; the middleman is responsible for operating the organization, selling works or tickets to those who have the money to buy art; the public will pay enough money to buy art, the middleman's investment will be rewarded, and the artist's creation will be continued. Depending on the size, this distribution system can be divided into two types, one is a small-scale gallery - the merchant system or the manager system, and the other is a large-scale cultural industry system. In addition to being sensitive to money, Murakami's businessman gene is also reflected in the sensitivity to the market. The imaginary artist should be free from the fireworks on earth and sacrifice a lot to pursue his own expression and art. However, Takashi Murakami examines art from a very secular perspective. He believes that there is not much difference between the art world and other industries, except that producers are replaced by artists, but there is still a complete business operation system behind them, such as marketing, management, transportation and so on. Therefore, art is a business. If you want to do a good job, you must be familiar with the way the art business works. Murakami also pointed out that famous critics have played a turning point and a pusher on the road to the artist's fame, so as long as they win the critics, the art road will suddenly become more and more open.

Under Becker's theory, this art distribution mechanism profoundly influenced the aesthetic quality of art. However, in his eyes, the art world is not without conflict, not a completely harmonious and optimistic picture. In Takashi Murakami's opinion, Europe and the United States are the art centers of the world, and they have absolute

right to speak. If any person wants to be a successful artist, you must understand the evaluation system of the European and American markets. The evaluation system in Europe and the United States is completely different from the evaluation system of his country in Japan. First of all, for the Japanese, although they love image works, the number of comics consumed each year is huge, and many paintings are borrowed every year for exhibitions. Still staying in the stage of pursuing beauty and skillful skills. However, the European and American contemporary art evaluation system pays more attention to concepts and concepts. Only the first person who eats crabs will be praised, and behind others, even if done well, is not as valuable as the first person. At the same time, when evaluating art in Europe and America, he put them in the framework of past art history and ask what the significance of this new artwork is in art history. Therefore, in order to succeed, the artist must understand the history of art, and the works should be connected with the history of Western art history. After clearly recognizing the essence of the art world, Takashi Murakami decided to conquer the European and American audiences first, and then use the fame to counterattack Japan's strategy.

The most vivid expression of Murakami's businessman's genes is his Kaikai Kiki company, which specializes in the commercialization of Murakami's art, with branches in Tokyo, New York and Los Angeles. Takashi Murakami sells the original work to the wealthy, sells copies of works to the middle class, and sells cheap consumer goods such as mobile phone cases and T-shirts printed with sunflower prints to the general income group (Kozsilovics & Montaldo, 2016). In economic

terms, Takashi Murakami realized the effect of price discrimination through the various price products of Kaikai Kiki Company, and transformed each group's love for his art into real money. As Becker pointed out, art is not simple, and artists are not a relaxed profession. Art is two-way and requires the viewer to form a closed loop. A successful artwork should have a strong ability to infect and resonate with the audience. Therefore, artists can't look at the car behind closed doors, and they can't extricate themselves in self-satisfaction, but they must consider the opinions of the audience. After all, the artist himself is only a producer, and the audience is a commentator. The cost of a painting is just some paints and canvases, but some paintings can sell sky-high prices, and some paintings are worthless. This shows that the pricing of paintings is not determined by the artist's expectations, but actually endowed by the audience.

### **3. The Judgement of Artwork**

#### **3.1 Murakami and His Superflat Style**

What is "Superflat"? That is to completely abandon the depth and solidity of the oil painting, from three-dimensional to two-dimensional visual presentation. As Murakami said in an interview ,When I first proposed "superflat", we are still not in the online world. I only refine and generalize the social and artistic forms of the time. From the historical and social level, since the Second World War, Japan's original pyramid-like class society, such as the emperor, the nobility, and the super chaebol with real power, have been destroyed. Now, although we have a symbolic emperor,

others are flat. In such a social structure, the people live well and continue to this day. In addition, from the artistic aesthetics, both traditional Japanese art and popular comics have flat visual features. This is the original intention of my "superflat"the information in the Internet era is very transparent. When information is shared, the whole world is in a flat state - thus, the concept of "Superflat" has expanded. However, I believe that the hierarchical form of human society is constantly changing. When it is at the peak of "Superflat", it will slowly form the shape of the pyramid again; and when some of the information is further disclosed, it will gradually flatten down, which is a process of recurring. The shaping of this theory is related to the Japanese culture that Murakami was exposed to. In his works, he puts forward the core issue that best reflects the epitome of Japanese contemporary culture. Murakami's superflat, comic-style, exaggerated works are all born in Japan's "Otaku" culture.(Sharp, 2006)

In Japan's repressed and hierarchical social environment, one end is an ordinary person who climbs hard and one end is a loser who is excluded from the crowd. The losers' self-destruction gave birth to the "Otaku" culture. Use a splendid, exaggerated dream to solve the helplessness of real life. The "Otaku" culture affects many people, but in the eyes of the mainstream society and the mainstream media, it is something that is not elegant. So from the beginning, as the artist's "superflat theory" and as a sociologist Becker's work - the deviant label theory of the outsiders coincides. Becker's art world published in 1982, partly used With the label theory, from labeling the theory of deviance to the study of art, it can be said that the label theory of art was

first proposed. Before Murakami's creation of the "Superflat" theory, the Japanese otaku culture was already in the mainstream culture. Murakami is not the first artist to make such a creation. His success lies in extracting and sublimating the essence of the otaku culture and symbolizing a culture other than the mainstream and social elite. Murakami did not interpret his works too much aesthetically. He did not declare that this is a culture other than Japanese mainstream culture.

In the absence of a fine interpretation, it is impossible to make a judgment on the art of "This is the Japanese otaku" for Takashi Murakami's work. The labeling process of otaku is not so much an aesthetic construction process, but rather a process of rationalizing and mainstreaming the culture of socially deviant people. Murakami's art work under the ultra-flat concept of gaining a great reputation is also. On the other side, it bears the doubts of society. It is considered not to be an art in the process of integration into the mainstream, but it is not considered to represent the true deviant edge culture after standing firm.

Innovation activities require everyone's cooperation, and innovators control the overall layout. They can dominate an art world on their own. In short, the changes in a book come through through changes in the world. Innovation begins with a change in an artistic conception or idea, and will continue to absorb this change. However, their success depends on the extent to which supporters can mobilize support from others. Ideas and ideas are important, but their success and endurance depend on the organization, not their own intrinsic value. Eventually new art circles emerge from

time to time, grow, prosper, and finally gain sufficient stability. 's flat theory and a series of works of art really follow this path.

Murakami established Kaikai Kiki in 2001 to create a group of celebrity artists in a similar way to the record company. This group was born, for example. This group operation is very different from the way in which artists individually participated in art circles. His company became a fortress to propagate and solidify its artistic ideas, and the fortress itself became an institution with Takashi Murakami as its core and extended to the world. He tried to create a continuous market, which was discovered and established by the artist and the company he founded, so the art market and social reputation belonging to Takashi Murakami finally consolidated from all aspects.

Murakami's artwork has produced many affordable derivatives, a business route crafted by his team. When I search for home decorations on Taobao in China, I will find that Murakami's Sun Flower is a high-purchase art industry. From the art museum to the most common online store, we will observe an interesting phenomenon. The artist not only can harvest the collector's favor, but also has a very wide fan base. He is both an artist, an darling of the auction house and a promoter of popular culture. He is an Internet celebrity. In addition to knowing how the art market works, Takashi Murakami also delved into the reasons why successful artists are successful. For example, the work should be surrounded by life, death, beauty, sex, and repetition. With these elements, with unique ideas, iconic styles, and mature economic minds, an artist can achieve basic success in the art world in order to survive. Murakami's work is not as simple as a brush. He involves a huge team. Some

of his art industrial products will also have direct links to factories in Guangdong or Vietnam. From the creation of concepts, the appearance of works, the subcontracting of production and the continuous construction of labeling, the interaction with the entire art world reflects a complete artistic business chain. There are not only artists, but also factory workers and salespeople. Linking to Becker's art label theory, through Murakami's artistic experience, it can be understood that art has no intrinsic inherent essence, but only people construct it in society.

In 1993, Takashi Murakami became the first doctor of Japanese painting at the Tokyo University of the Arts. The traditional Japanese painting technique failed to help Murakami to impress the collectors. He only got a scholarship from the Asian Cultural Association and seized a chance to go to New York for further studying for a year. Facts have proved that this experience was crucial to Takashi Murakami. If Paris was the capital of the art world in the first half of the 20th century, New York was crowned in the second half of the century. No matter how much ridicule that contemporary art has endured, the American tycoon still moved the pop style and abstract expressionism into the living room as if they were brainwashed. Takashi Murakami believed that he had found a real gap between Japanese and European and American art: Europe and the United States had mature art markets and marketing models, and Japanese artists, even contemporary artists who were advertised as pioneers, were only copying and following from the western worlds.

To be inspired, Murakami regarded Andy Warhol as a model of this fancy game. Warhol took photos of Monroe, Yoko Ono and himself, attended cocktail

parties hosted by celebrities, and magically moved canned tomato soup from the mall to the art gallery. Warhol did not hide his desire for fame and fortune. For Warhol, art does not need to be elegant, and it is completely contradictory to business, or even the same thing. This cynicism was later inherited by Murakami, so much so that he was called “ the Andy Warhol of Japan.” Indeed, there could be only one Andy Warhol. As a Japanese artist, Murakami seemed to have a natural obligation to tell a slightly different story. Takashi Murakami named the story "superflat". In 2000, Takashi Murakami held a group exhibition of contemporary art with the theme of superflat in Tokyo. In the following year, he visited the exhibition in Los Angeles. Western art critics began to notice this fresh Japanese label.

The definition or judgment of an artwork piece is a complicated and interesting question. As Becker pointed out in his theory of art worlds, simply limiting the analysis to the artworks that are already recognized in a society we might miss out a lot of compelling things. For example, some extraordinary works might be rejected by the mass just because they are too advanced; or in some cases, some items or creations might be considered highly artistic, however ,the producers do not hold an intention to make it art. In this case, Becker explained the meaning of not professional art worlds, such as a woman from the countryside of United States might be able to make beautiful quilts. Of which the patterns might even have many similarities with contemporary art, but they are made for keeping warm in the family, so they have never been regarded as a piece of artwork (Perrenoud, 2017). Following this theory, it



is not difficult for us to consider the opposite situation, which is, some so-called artworks seem to be confusing to most people. Although Becker did not say it directly, he did imply this. When discussing Duchamp's famous pieces like the Fountain and the Snow Shovel, or Andy Warhol's Brillo Box, Becker pointed out they had not shown any artistic characteristics no matter in technical level or intentional level. However, these artworks have become classics in the 20th century artistic field.

Thus, what is art? How to define art? What does the style of art mean? The origin of the style of artists requires us to go back to examine the art of the Renaissance era. The history of graphic art opens insightful perspectives and useful reference points, and artists such as Raphael and Johannes Vermeer utilized unique techniques to create a new artistic vision for their audience. As the first British critic Lawrence Alloway, who used the term "pop art," said in 1959: Mass production technology, once used to produce accurate and repeatable text, pictures and music, the result is a large number of symbols and symbols for consumption. If you want to bring this unique flowering field with the unique ideas of Renaissance art, it is impossible to move. To accept the mass media, we must change our perception of what culture is. What we need is not to leave the text to the most advanced works of art and the noblest ideas in the top ten of history, but to use it extensively to describe "what society does." Returning to the present day, post-painterly abstraction and abstract expressionism have been successively published, overthrowing the persistence of traditional paintings over the painted objects, rejecting the visual

reproductive function of paintings, and returning to the purest act of creation on canvas (Zhao, 2004). Certain genres such as Pop Art and montage art, are a continuation of this progression.

Back to the Japanese artist Takashi Murakami, whose works have caused a lot of controversy due to the advanced artistry. Nevertheless, his artworks have caused a great uproar in the world of art and has had a profound impact on the future style of Japanese pop art. Murakami is the founder of the superflat art movement. The word superflat was a term Murakami firstly coined, referring to the two-dimensional attributes of Japanese anime, art creation, and graphic design. It also criticized the shallow Japanese public culture. After World War II, Japan also experienced a series of changes, which indicated the “flattening” popular culture and social class. In the 1990s, Takashi Murakami proposed that the Japanese society was entering the era of superfalt style and emphasized that the future Japanese society, customs, culture, and art would all become extremely flat. There is another concept in the superflat style artworks, which is the otaku culture in Japan. Otaku especially refers to a group of people who are extremely fascinated by animation. These super-anime fans understand the specific content and are willing to bid deep and expand the influence of their favorite things. Later, the concept otaku also refers to people who are keen on other forms of subculture and have in-depth research on them (Steinberg, 2014). Figure 1 shows the superflat style of Murakami’s artwork and the spirit of otaku.



Figure 2 Takashi Murakami, 'The World of Sphere', 2003

It can be seen that the new art term for superflat describes a specific type of Japanese contemporary art that compresses or "flattens" various graphic designs, art and pop culture. Superflat combines popular aesthetics with Japanese Kawaii (cute) culture, and publicly cites the flatness and two-dimensionality of anime (animation) and manga (comics). However, the term also conceals a double meaning: according to art critic Hunter Drohojowska-Philp, Superflat also represents "the shallow emptiness of consumer culture (Stout, 2013)". Therefore, in this sense, when Murakami was created for Louis Vuitton When designing, some people want to know whether he is advocating brand consumerism or cynical comment on its hypocrisy. In any case, according to Becker's theory of judgment on art, we can generally tend to say that Murakami's works contain strong artistic creation motives. The artistic controversy about his work may be more reflected in his later ridicule and super strong commercial promotions.

### 3.2 Murakami's Label and Fame

In the Art world, the power of labeling and fame is crucial. As Becker pointed out, many works without artistic characteristics can become classics after getting attention. People not only respond to the objective characteristics of a state, but sometimes respond first to the meaning that this state has for people. Moreover, once people give this state a certain meaning, their subsequent behavior and the resulting results are determined by the meaning of this cause (Merton, 2006). It can be seen that the power of the label is so great that the power of the labeler cannot be ignored. At the same time, Becker did not over-exaggerate the power of the label. Becker did not say that as long as we label the object with a deviant or artistic label, the object must be deviant or artistic. In terms of deviance, Becker argued that although the theory of deviance suggested that defining someone as a deviant person may trigger some kind of behavior under certain circumstances, this was not the same as supporting that a mental hospital would drive normal people mad, or a prison would make people recidivists. As for art, Becker believed in the same perspective, he claimed that not everything could be turned into a piece of artwork simply through definition or consensus. As a sociologist, Becker did not take the initiative to label as an esthetician, but instead studied the label itself as a process. As he declared in his theory of art worlds, he pointed out that his theory did not make any aesthetic judgments. Instead, it aimed at discussing aesthetic judgment as a typical phenomenon in collective activities."

Since 1990, Takashi Murakami has been active in the Japanese art world. His works combine the opposite elements of Eastern and Western civilizations, elegant art and popular culture, while retaining entertainment and appreciation. It is a combination of Japanese contemporary pop art and traditional Japanese painting style. This superflat style also inherits the style of the code-based image; in the second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Art in 1996, Murakami Takashi published his "superflat declaration" with the work "Mr. DOB" in a blunt anime style. In his declaration, Murakami straightly pointed out that "The future society, customs, art, and culture will become two-dimensional, as well as Japan would be... Today, Japanese video games and cartoon animations best express this trait, and they are the most powerful force in the cultural world." Murakami has implanted the variant image of Mickey Mouse into his own work, Mr. DOB, as an incarnation of his own and a unique visual symbol. Including cartoon paintings, semi-finished sculptures, huge inflatable balloons, performance theaters, watches and T-shirts, Murakami has painted the "Mr. DOB" pattern on all his products or works. Unique signature. Takashi Murakami believes that after the social pressures such as the post-war, economic bubble and Sarin gas incidents, the reality of disillusionment and the transformation of psychological machines have turned the Japanese society to a flattering trend of loving sweetness. His declaration made Eastern graphic art challenge the history of Western art and made contemporary comics art an important genre of global art history.

The graphic nature of the cartoons offered up a powerful and international aesthetic force; it opened up the superflat style of post-modern art, 14 years prior to the official establishment of the Cool Japan Overseas Exhibition Room in 2010. He is not an exaggeration for the ultra-flat style. Born in a village, Murakami was influenced by Japanese animation and Japanese manga, and focused on otaku culture. His works are flat, with a strong otaku sense, forming an extreme collection of cuteness, sexual fantasy, and violence. Obviously, the superflat style is the label of Takashi Murakami. Murakami's works are flat in appearance, and look like a toy model, like a doll, a collection of cute, sexual fantasy and extreme violence, with a strong cartoon color, but at the same time insinuating Japanese cultural connotations. As works of art, they are difficult to draw lines with commercial paintings. They are both modern and traceable to traditional roots. They are also embossed in the style of ukiyo-e and Rinpa school from the 17th century of Japan, and everyone can appreciate them. The cute and comical image is actually ridiculing the more and more superficial mass culture, flat and lacking in depth, which is the seriousness and criticism behind the playful drama, making him one of the most popular and controversial artists in the world.

The attitude towards label and fame reflects Murakami's profound and unique insight into Becker's artistic concept and theory. In his book on Art Entrepreneurship, Takashi Murakami (2005) mentioned "The historical drawers that open up the context can produce value and popularity." He believes that in the final analysis, artists should have their own creative philosophy, but must also find a way to make their work leave

traces in the torrent of history, and making the money to do so is as important as the work itself. If you uphold the attitude of self-marketed artwork and spurn the commercialization of the art world, it is difficult for the artist to become a mainstream creator. To put it simply, Takashi Murakami believes that a strong desire for money does not hinder artistic creation. The question is how an artist expresses and reconciles their desires, and integrate this desire into their creative process. He then claimed: when you buy a work of art from an artist, you also buy part of his life. This is also what this paper tries to argue.

In any case, Takashi Murakami's label and fame brought him tremendous artistic and market influence. In cooperation with the French brand Louis Vuitton, he designed handbags and other products, including a limited-edition cherry blossom handbag. As such, Murakami has greatly increased his visibility, and pushed his career to its greatest peak to date. His work "727" was sold for 100 million yen in 2006, his highest price to date. His 2008 doll "My Lonely Cowboy" also sold for 15.16 million US dollars. These prices made him the most expensive modern artist in Japan at that time. His art creation company also reached a turnover of 300 million US dollars in 2011 (Zhang & Hong, 2015). In the past, when the otaku and animation art style was less accepted, the public barely paid attention to the cartoon-inspired artworks. The beauty of the animation world is the weakness of the real world and its freedom from common sense and realism that confines the rest of the world. In the past, it was regarded as a form of anime subculture. Now, combined with the

super-flat art style, the cartoon-inspired art has rapidly become an important genre of global art history.

## **4. Negotiations and Practices in the Art Worlds: Internalization and Marketization**

### **4.1 In the Past 20 Years: Challenging, Controversial.**

The artist's competition in the market will eventually be displayed through the sales of the primary market and the secondary market. Collectors, especially prestigious family collections, play a vital role in improving the artist's overall career. Artwork not only needs to prove its place in art history, but also needs to reflect its value in the circulating market. Most people not only care about whether their originality impresses themselves or whether they have artistic value when they buy art, but at the same time, art is also a part of asset allocation with investment nature. Takashi Murakami believes that in the art of my agency operation, the criteria for reviewing works are clear: whether they can stand the test of the auction market. Because artists need to be responsible for value beyond the cost of art. Whether art can withstand the test of the market and the return to the collector's contribution is one of the issues that contemporary artists need to consider carefully. When the work enters the market with dozens of times of value, I must make the content of the work catch up with such evaluations. (Murakami, 2011)

Most of Murakami's top artworks have sold at the main auction houses, Christie's, Sotheby's and Philip de Pure & Company. His highest-priced sale was mostly



finished in the United States. Also, Asia regions like Chinese Hong Kong and Chinese mainland has also realized the high hammer price. Sculptures are the main highest-priced category. The highest price was achieved in 2008 when *My Lonesome Cowboy* sold for \$13,500,000. Compared to the second highest one, this price is almost doubled. In addition, although Murakami's works have been popular in the auction houses for around 20 years, most of the high-priced works appeared in the last 10 years' auction activities.

<b>Takashi Murakami: Top Artworks</b>					
<b>Art Title</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Auction House</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Sale Year</b>	<b>Price</b>
My Lonesome Cowboy, 1998	Sculpture Volume	Sotheby's	U.S.A	2008	US\$13,500,000.00
Dragon in clouds-red mutation, 2010	Painting	Council Shanghai	CN	2018	US\$7,674,814.00
Miss Ko <sup>2</sup> , 1997	Sculpture Volume	Phillips de Pury & Company	U.S.A	2010	US\$6,000,000.00
Tan Tan Bo, 2001	Painting	Christie's	U.S.A	2018	US\$4,200,000.00
The Castle of Tin Tin, 1998/2003	Painting	Sotheby's	U.S.A	2012	US\$3,700,000.00
DOB in the strange forest (Red DOB),1999	Sculpture Volume	Christie's	U.S.A	2008	US\$3,000,000.00
Panda, 2002	Sculpture Volume	Seoul Auction	H.K (CN)	2017	US\$2,945,380.00
Kaikai KiKi, 2005	Sculpture Volume	Christie's	U.K	2010	US\$2,696,030.00
Miss Ko <sup>2</sup> , 1997	Sculpture Volume	Sotheby's	H.K (CN)	2017	US\$2,445,521.00
DOB in the strange forest (Blue DOB),1999	Sculpture Volume	Christie's	U.S.A	2011	US\$2,400,000.00

The perception that Takashi Murakami's art is considered worthy of investment by collectors and ordinary consumers is constructed step by step. First of all, from the primary market point of view, Hiropon, Murakami's first dolls, was welcomed in the United States, because the artist believes that the center of origin of modern animation comes from Japan, which coincided with the US's pursuit of this boom. Very good results. Then Takashi Murakami launched the most famous male doll, "My Lonesome Cowboy", which was the symbol of the otaku, and chose the place where it was released in Los Angeles to cater to the trend of culture and fashion. Many stars joined the team of Murakami fans. Because Hollywood stars have a demonstrative role in popular culture around the world, which has attracted worldwide fashion attention, a large number of fans, even if they can't afford or can't buy such dolls, naturally produce products for Murakami and his company. Art is in demand. Of course, Takashi Murakami is not smooth sailing, and his "Miss Ko2" doll has been backed up by a large amount of goods and cannot be sold. Murakami boarded Miss Ko<sup>2</sup> in a Japanese art magazine, brought it to the United States after an art historian's review, and called the doll Miss Ko<sup>2</sup> the prototype of My Lonesome Cowboy. After some marketing design, it was thought that this doll was used as an otaku. The original appearance of the doll is also worthy of attention and collection. In addition, Takashi Murakami's superflat exhibition has just been successfully closed, and all of the more than 200 Miss Ko<sup>2</sup>s have been sold.

The art world and the art market are overlapping and independent worlds. Artists

and works that leave their names in art history often achieve impressive business results in the marketplace. It's just a time lag. Murakami's series of works have stronger commercial attributes than other artists, which is the artist's pride and controversial place. The year 2008 was definitely one of the highest peaks of the contemporary art market. It was the best year for Murakami and other famous artists from the same period of time. This year, Takashi Murakami sold 250 pieces of artworks. Before the market fell sharply, his high-value paintings totaled \$3.3 million, with an average value of \$1.6 million each. In contrast, Hirst's total auction sales for the year was \$92.4 million, and the average selling price per piece was \$1.8 million. The same data for Koons was tabulated that year, with total sales of \$12.2 million and an average sale of just over \$3 million per piece. In the next year, along with the cooling down in the contemporary art market, Murakami's total sales were less than \$5 million, but the number of auction items had still reached nearly 150 pieces. Before the hot sale in 2018, the number of lots sold was between 200 and 550, and the annual turnover was less than \$18 million. The minimum turnover is almost less than \$5 million. Since 2007, the DOB series paintings have consistently performed at auctions, surpassing the S&P by 500.

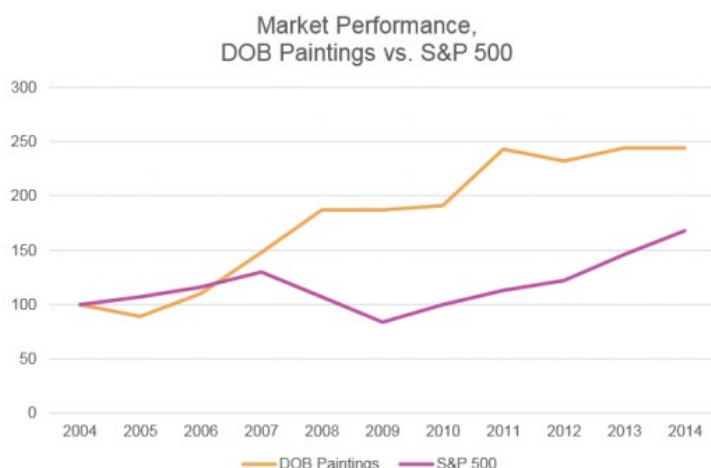


Figure 3 DOB vs. S&P paintings market performance

Among all his artworks, Murakami’s record value for his paintings is The Castle of Tin Tin (1998), a DOB painting sold at Sotheby’s New York in November 2012 for \$4.2 million. Regarding only on the high value ones (let us say those sold for over \$1 million per piece), according to the artnet market watch statistics, the total auction sales and average sales price of high value paintings created by the most famous artists including Murakami, Hirst, Koons, and Nara, is shown in figure 2. As we could see, though Hirst and Koons hold a relatively larger volume of those paintings, the average value for Murakami’s artworks is clearly rising in these years.

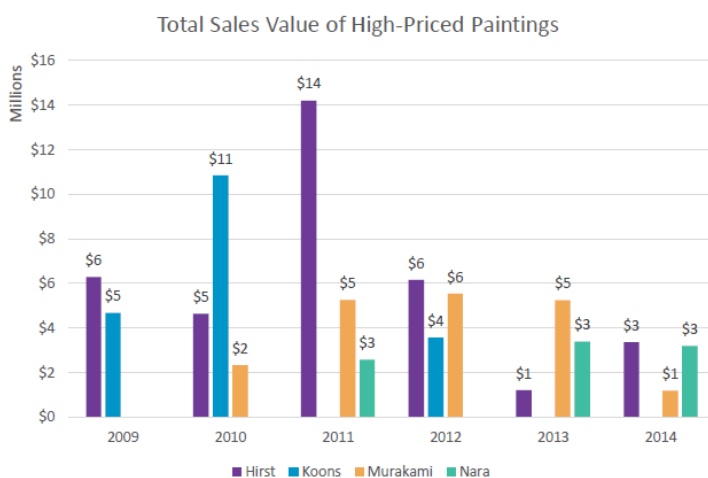


Figure 4 Sales comparison of high-value paintings

The sales trend of Murakami's paintings may have regularity. Overall, the number of works sold by Takashi Murakami is relatively stable each year. But after a period of stability, the value suddenly increased dramatically. However, after a year of this kind of increasing value, the price of his work may drop rapidly to a low point, but after the low point, the price of art may stabilize again and prepare for the next year of growth. Most of Murakami's works can be sold for between \$100,000 and \$50 million. In addition, some works may be worth more than \$50 million. In general, Murakami's work has been maintained within the ideal price range.

Artnet market observations show that the total sales of Murakami's paintings (not only those high-value works) jumped from \$7 million in the previous year to nearly \$12 million in 2008. Under the influence of the global economic crisis, the sales of Murakami's paintings dropped sharply to \$3 million in 2009 (following the decline of the wider art market). However, the volume of transactions in the following years recovered well, reaching \$6 million in 2010 and rebounding to \$14 million annually in 2011 and 2013 (There is no final data for the 2014 auction sale). As shown in Figure 3, from the sales of non-high-priced works, Murakami's works are in line with the volatility rules described above.

Generally, Murakami's works are an ideal choice to invest. This is the result of the collective collaboration of the art worlds, which leads directly to the steady and continuous progress of the commercial world due to the peak year in 2018, the current secondary market performance is not ideal, Murakami's pieces still have wonderful future potential. There are several reasons to choose his pieces: first,

Takashi Murakami's works have great artistic values. His works are meaningful and powerful. The Japanese artist Midori Matsui has given the comments on him: "The importance of his work is precisely owing to the visibility and scale of his ambition, as well as his ability to see possibility in obscure and despised corners of cultural production. His critical acuity, formed in response to the negativity of the postwar Japanese condition, takes him beyond its limits." (Matsui, 2007) He occupies an important position in the field of contemporary art, also he is one of the most well-known leaders of Japanese Neo-pop art. Therefore, the pieces of "Japanese Warhol" could remain an ideal value status. Second, Takashi Murakami is active with high recognition. He is a successful businessman who involved in many different fields like fashion and design. One of his most significant design, the smiling flower, has been popular with young people.

This is an important reason for Murakami to keep his high popularity among the new consumer groups. Third, Japanese manga culture has been growing globally. This is a highly recognized culture in Europe, America, and Asia. Thus, the Japanese manga culture represented by Murakami's art is also highly recognized in the auction market. This also means that his works have a better market capacity. Finally, according to historical data, Murakami's works may have a big opportunity to rise after the price stabilization, and the range of appreciation is considerable. For instance, in 2010, the average price of his work per lot was around \$173.5k. Then the prices fell, during the stabilization period (2011-2017), the average price was between \$48.8k-\$75.7k. However, in 2018, the average price has reached \$121.2k. (lotsearch)

Currently, the average price of his work has fallen to \$12.7, which indicates the next stabilization period is coming.

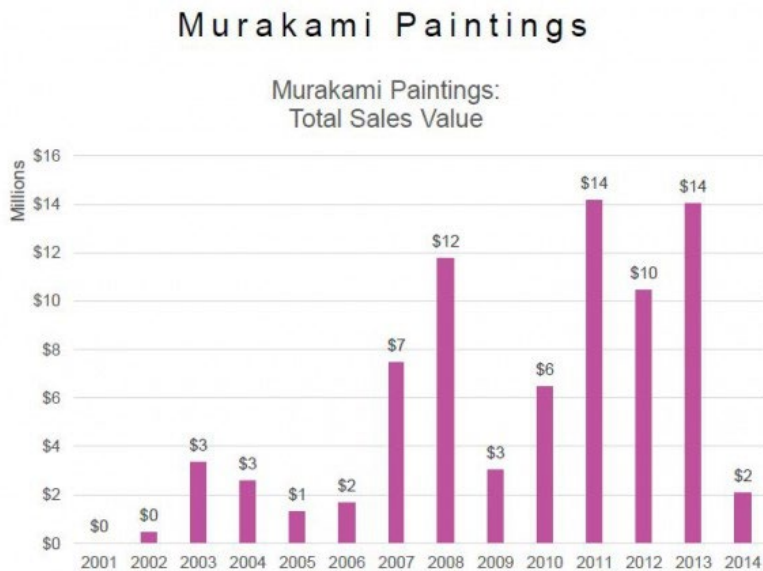


Figure 5 total sales of Murakami's paintings

Figure 34 also points out that both the volume of transactions and the volume of transactions declined in 2012. This situation was improved in 2013 (28 lots in 2012, 21 pieces sold for \$13.5 million; in 2013 there were 40 lots, 30 pieces were sold for \$16.8 million). However, the total amount of auctions in 2014 fell to \$3.6 million, falling to the level of 2004-05. For the first time, the Murakami market has deviated from the broader market: his decline, while the broader market has reached an unprecedented level. Interestingly, six of the top ten auction prices for Murakami's works were set in 2010 or earlier. Compared with another artist, Gerhard Richter, he reached \$15 million in 2008-10, but the market has reached new heights since then.

Murakami's 2016 auction revenue reached 80% of his 2015 total revenue (\$8.4 million), which was about \$6.7 million. Also, Miss KO2 returned to the market again in April and sold at Sotheby's in Hong Kong for \$2.9 million (estimate at \$1.9 million

to \$2.6 million), a sharp drop from the 2008 record. However, in the light of market conditions, the entire market has experienced a sharp decline during the same period. For many artists, the decline is much larger than Murakami. Moreover, the average value per lot exceeds the 2008 level (\$525,000 in 2017; \$475,000 in 2008).

The importance of Takashi Murakami's work is unquestionable, but his controversy and misunderstanding are not small. For many people, he is a bold innovator in a prosperous period. He has the market appeal of integrating Eastern and Western aesthetics, and the preservation of his works is not stable. In fact, his work is very considerate, clever, and complicated, even if it seems to be simple. He is such an artist: when the world feels challenged and the taste of art becomes more sober, prices may fall. But that time is a huge opportunity for collectors, because there is no doubt that the complexity of Murakami's works will be better understood as time goes by.

Takashi Murakami's auction market also has geographic differences. Through the Geographic distribution data, it is clear that Murakami's works are popular in North America, Europe, Oceania, and Asia. Especially in the United States, the auction market has shown enough enthusiasm in selling his pieces.

Becker is known as the representative of label theory. Undoubtedly, in the deviant research, the labeling process is indeed the most compelling interactive process. However, the labeling process is just an interactive process, not all. It can be said that when studying the more complicated art world, Becker did not copy the label theory, but still implemented the logic of his interactive theory, showing the more complicated interactive process in the art world. Becker has advanced the theory of



interaction to the art world, which has brought new insights into this field. Samuel Gilmore once pointed out: "The Art World shows that using a specific context - art to analyze an abstract concept - an interactive study of social structure - is How to be instructive, not obscured" (Gilmore, 1990: 148). Richard A. Peterson praised Art World as the "most inclusive and influential" work on art from the perspective of symbolic interaction (Peterson, 1994: 181-182).

In the previous study of Takashi Murakami, there have been no examples of involvement with Becker's sociological theory. Therefore, from the perspective of Becker's theory of artistic sociology, I observe Murakami's artistic construction, especially how to observe the art of Murakami's tilapia culture from a otaku culture representing the outsider to a category in pop art. The result of the overall collaboration of the art world. As Mr. Murakami said in an interview, if there is no factory collaboration and team assistants, the number of his works may not exceed 30.

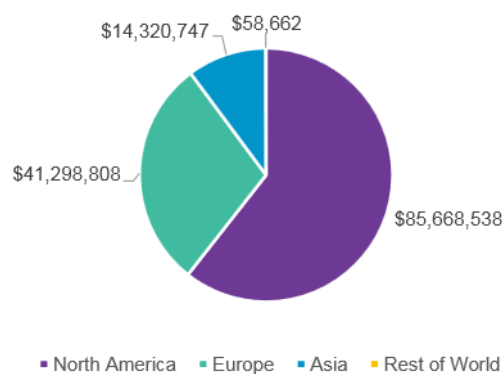


Figure 6 Murakami total sales by region

Data from Artprice Report has indicated that amounts of the auction sales were made in North America, followed by Europe, Asia, and Oceania. The data has indicated that 1,735 pieces were sold in Japan, accounting for 34% of the total worldwide lots. Although Japan has sold a large number of lots, the total turnover is

far ahead of the United States. The United States has sold 1,083 pieces for \$87,055,32, which means that nearly half of the total turnover belongs to the United States. Also, Takashi Murakami's auction market in Europe is notable, the U.K and France have sold 1288 works. Next to the U.S, the U.K has achieved \$42, 637,245 in turnover. Moreover, Murakami's auction situation is positive. The turnover and lots number are ideal. Hong Kong has realized \$24,182,668 in the past twenty years.

According to historical data, Murakami's works may have a big opportunity to rise after the price stabilization, and the range of appreciation is considerable. For instance, in 2010, the average price of his work per lot was around \$173.5k. Then the prices fell, during the stabilization period (2011-2017), the average price was between \$48.8k-\$75.7k. However, in 2018, the average price has reached \$121.2k. (lotsearch) Currently, the average price of his work has fallen to \$12.7, which indicates the next stabilization period is coming.

The specific data above explained the market fluctuations of Takashi Murakami's art in the past two decades. Murakami's *Theory of art entrepreneurship* emphasizes the use of money to measure the success of artists, especially from the secondary market. At the same time, Murakami has paid more attention to his exhibitions and whether the artists to which his company belongs bring corresponding social radiation. In Becker's theory of the art world, a mature group or a successful online organization depends on whether a familiar group pays for it and is willing to follow up and wait and see the future development. (Becker, 1982) This situation is similar to the Berlin Philharmonic or the Chicago Symphony Orchestra with its own fixed audience, and

the audience will pass on this aesthetic habit and purchase behavior to similar communities or to their descendants. Contemporary artists have not experienced time lapses, nor do they have sufficient aesthetic judgment to predict the future. So at this stage, especially paying close attention to the art sales for 20 years, you can observe whether Murakami has established his own art world. Facts have proved that his art world and art market are complementary. Although there is still a lot of controversy, it was successful at this stage using data to judge or measure market response.

#### **4.2 The Beckerian Sense of the World: Why the Market Chooses Murakami**

Why does the market choose artists? Becker's art theory understands artistic behavior as a more neutral interaction. This kind of interaction is not a quiet and goodwill relationship. On the contrary, people involved in collective action may fight each other or make a detour. Zolberg pointed out that Becker was actually influenced by Simmel's concept of social interaction. Becker believes that conflicts are absorbed by socialization or cooperation, which in turn generates reaction (Zolberg, 2013). Takashi Murakami believes that the Japanese art industry lacked a reliable and sustainable art market support for decades after the war. For this reason, he developed a strategy: first, exhibiting in Western art institutions, then returning to Japan to promote his work and values, and acquiring the Japanese art market. Of course, in order to distinguish it from Western artists, he must create some images, even labels, identities that are rooted in his own Japanese culture and history, and that it is fresh and effective for the international art world, so he began to look for some cultural

elements that only Japan could provide. However, the conclusion is that elegant, too experimental and avant-garde art is difficult to promote in the public – as the Chinese slang said “Songs of a highbrow type will find very few people to join in the chorus” - so he began to focus on the Japanese sub culture is especially for animation and comics, as well as the big Asian culture of the otaku.

The motivation behind the market selection of Murakami can be interpreted from Becker’s theory relating artistic identity. For the theory of artistic identity, it is systematically embodied in Becker's other famous book, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. In this book, Becker believes that the process for an artist to become an outsider refers to the process when the rule makers define things while interacting with others. Whether or not a certain act is deviant is the judgment of the behavior being regulated and the reaction of others to the behavior (actually is the norm of socialization, but the opinions of others may not fully reflect the current overall norms). The norms of society as a whole are often not simply constituted by the consensus reached by all involvers. A social norm often reflects the willingness of some coercive groups (such as governments to define norms, capitalists to maximize profits, teachers to achieve control over students), and this type of norms often cause the public both yielded and reached a tacit acceptance of the deviance. Which means, when some people under the same deviant label form a group. Takashi Murakami has refined the Japanese otaku culture and sublimated it to the height of art. In the two decades of exhibitions, sales, aesthetic propaganda, and cross-border cooperation, more and more people have accepted this principle. Murakami's artistic norms. He not

only discovered that the otaku culture has the potential for sustainable fermentation, but also gave the work a strong meaning, and proposed a unique self-core value for the world.

Becker had further divided the artist's identity into four categories in his article *Art Works and Social Types*: the integrated professionals, the mavericks, the naive artists, and folk artists (Becker, 1976). In the history of art, artists who are uniquely qualified will often be honored as “masters”, which is why Monet, Picasso and Andy Warhol have so far become brilliant and highly prized. This may be the reason behind Takashi Murakami's long-standing success in the highly competitive art market. In the follow-up book *Art Worlds*, Becker continued such an analytical perspective, thinking that art and deviant are both identities, and the two are like reflections. A label that deliberately avoids, a label that needs to be actively pursued (Becker, 2008). Takashi Murakami once mentioned his observations about them: they indulged in comics, video games and cartoon animations, grew up among them, and even became a part of this scene, they represented Japan, and a certain state of life and values of life in the present society.

As a labeled artist, Murakami's brand is produced in the interaction of the art world. In this process, there are factors such as power. In other words, Becker believes that artists do not have any intrinsic essence (such as talent) to make them artists. Individuals can become artists, just because people label him as an "artist." In this regard, Becker believes that it is not the identity of the artist group that is worthy of attention, but the entire social definition process in which individuals are labeled as

artists.

The exhibitions that have been held throughout his career have been great, and the exhibition seems to be pure and has a wide appeal. Takashi Murakami is a true bold artist. His exhibition is casual and not deliberate and calculated, but he will personally choose the location. While creating the mysterious colors surrounding his brand, it also attracted international collectors. Takashi Murakami has compiled his own books into several books, hoping that the works can also be seen by others, not just collectors. Because of this, he stopped making derivatives and paintings. Instead, he started making books because people he knew could not afford to buy his works, but could afford books. It is with this ease that he has achieved such an international success.

In addition, we can't help but try to understand the process of producing art, which involves Becker's discussion about the production and distribution stages of art: for the production stage, it is necessary to supply raw materials and support personnel, such as photographic production. Films required for the process, concert performers, etc. For the distribution phase, Becker mainly takes the sponsors (church, rich, government, and company) in the artist's artistic creation process as an example. He believes that when the four sponsors sponsor the artist, no one will take the artist's aesthetics. Interests are based on thinking about problems, but they all think about problems from their own interests. In this kind of sponsored system, they occupy a dominant position, their own interests are the artists must satisfy, and artists cannot freely pursue their own aesthetic interests (Becker, 2008). In Becker's view, although

“a participant in the art world has a common interest in completing work,” “they also have potentially conflicting personal interests. In fact, the conflict between different kinds of participants is long-term. And the traditional ", the artist works in this net of checks and balances. This network has led to a huge impact on brokers and collectors in the art market.

## Summary

In combination with Becker's theory of art worlds, from the perspective of artistic definition, Murakami's label is composed of artist, businessman, and even speculator. It can be said that Takashi Murakami seized the transit of the market and the art world. The trend of the art world is to embrace the pop, embrace consumerism, and give enough room for interpretation. After repeated thoughts, Murakami returned to Japan after he had a place in the Western art world. He hoped to create works that were related to the Japanese history and culture that were deeply embedded in his heart, and that had a sense of freshness that can be recognized by the international market. Finally, he turned his attention to Japanese anime and comics. Like many Pop artists, Murakami also paid attention to the content, symbols, symbols, colors and other elements contained in mass consumer goods, and then applied them to artistic creation. The true elegance of culture in Japan is implicit and restrained. Comics and animation are a kind of mass consumer goods. It is not an art, but a subculture. However Murakami believed that comics and anime were developed independently by Japan and affected less aesthetically by the west, so it represented the unique side of Japan.

From the perspective of interactive relations, Murakami saw that Japan lacked a stable art market after the war. The society's understanding of art was limited to the superficial misappropriation of the West. It was a closed-door, artificially divided class structure. This state has been difficult to support the survival of the artists' group for many years. However, he took this pessimistic social status as an opportunity and determined to "reform" the concept of art. Therefore, the shocking "Ultra Flat Declaration" and Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. and the GEISAI Art Fair, through self-definition, gradually formed a self-contained artistic ecology outside the traditional gallery agency model.

These insights led Murakami to build a strong identity and label that made him accepted by the market. Everyone is foremost independent and has are free to choose their lifestyles and embrace their aesthetics, but they cannot live without being influenced by others. This might be the reason why Murakami's superflat art would be widely welcomed. The audience who likes them cannot have received any professional aesthetic education. This new kind of aesthetic education is intellectual and modern, as long as the audience understands a little bit of comic reading and is familiar with the comic viewing experience, they can easily appreciate his art. Therefore, everyone's freedom and choice may have a positive or negative impact on the freedom of others. For Murakami, the art world seems to be full of disappointment and obstruction, but also to be full of hopes and opportunities. Murakami's art world is both complicated and simple, perhaps as the artist himself said: "I just want to make my customers happy."



With the rise of the younger generation of collectors, the auction market is moving towards a multi-competitive “Hundred Schools of Contention” period, and the interest of Asian collectors has gradually shifted from Chinese contemporary art to the 20th century and contemporary art and design. At the same time, the trend of art is fierce, and KAWS, Banksy, Nara, Murakami and other popular artists are subverting the Asian market. Murakami has divided his art path into three phases:

First, in order to be recognized by Europe and the United States in the authentic art world, it is necessary to change the style of your work to meet local needs.

Second, based on the authority of Europe and the United States, we will create works that match Japanese preferences.

Third, introduce yourself in local art and let local people understand the connotation of their works. The “Superflat Exhibition” was recognized in the United States, and in Japan, the “Little Boy Show” was also launched to express the local authentic taste.

Two cartoon characters became the highest-priced Japanese contemporary artists, and they put them into the production line. After entering the 21st century, it opened a solo exhibition at the Louvre and got Visa, which is open to the world. Not only in the art world, Murakami has a very active performance in the commercial market. He founded his own art company and collected his disciples (this is also the most popular point of the public, because most works are collectively done, and Murakami does not have any personally. Participation) has also cooperated with many well-known brands and achieved great success. Takashi Murakami reflects a very

important model of modern society, namely the export of cultural products under the conditions of globalization and the cross-border cooperation between art and business. It must be said that when large companies sponsor contemporary artists to cooperate with them, they hope to use the influence of the world to achieve cross-border cultural integration with economies of scale. For contemporary art, however, this is a pressure that forces them to create a multicultural blend.

Murakami's artistic ideas and works reflect the unique cultural connotations of contemporary Japanese society. But these things are not straightforward, it is artistically processed. Among the derivative art products that cooperate with many luxury goods, Murakami's new pop is more widely spread. The art world and the business community have begun to overlap, blending and even rubbing. Collectors can collect prints and installations, and consumers can also purchase high-end consumer goods that are co-branded. This is what the theory of the art has concluded. "Innovative activities require everyone's cooperation (the author's note: including the most common consumers), and the innovators control this. They can control an art world by themselves, whether they take over the existing institutions. , to replace those who used them before, or to share the use of those facilities, or to completely create a new network." In summary, Murakami has created his own art world, where every aspect of the art is critical, lacking Nothing. First win the recognition of Europe and the United States, quietly weave the mechanistics of Japanese subculture in the other's field, and then return to "export to domestic sales."

Murakami has now become a distinctive banner in contemporary art. With its

colorful cartoon style, it has captured countless audiences and created many art auction records and topics. In addition to receiving a lot of praise, it has also received a lot of criticism, especially the rebellion against Japanese photographic paintings, and unreasonable prices. He has the shadow of Andy Warhol in commercial marketing, and he can run his own art through large-scale manufacturing of art. Murakami's works not only exist in the primary market and the secondary market, but also affect consumers through large-scale reproduction of factories, and promote the sale of art goods. Every link of the whole chain reflects the collective writing of the art world, and in the long-term and long-lasting interaction, with the establishment and extension of the label, every link of the system will benefit. In an increasingly close interconnection, in the context of acclaimed circumstances and aesthetic attacks, both in the state of economic downturn and in the state of social value, the system has been firmly established step by step. Up, so Murakami's work and his personal will continue to be strong in the long run.

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