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Factors behind the successful positioning of Mexico City as an International Contemporary Art Center

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Factors behind the successful positioning of Mexico City as an
International Contemporary Art Center

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the Master's Degree in Art

Business

Sotheby's Institute of Art

May 2, 2022

Word count 12, 415

Abstract

The following thesis highlights the factors that have contributed to the successful positioning of Mexico City as an international contemporary art center. The city has expanded its artistic reach in the last few decades and its contemporary art market is now booming. The key to its successful positioning in the global art sphere lies in three main factors: collectors, galleries, and fairs. These art market players have had a significant role in the development of the city's vibrant art scene and have worked to expand it internationally. This investigation aims to answer questions on how the stakeholders have raised international awareness and drawn interest into the city. Furthermore, the findings contribute to the existing literature as a valuable study that encourages continuous research in the relevance of the Latin American art market in the world today. By focusing on Mexico City, this study will serve as an example for other scholars to build upon research on other Latin American art hubs such as Sao Paolo, Buenos Aires, and Bogota to strengthen the continent's international presence and cultivate its growth.

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Introduction

“The new collaborative movements have sought to take an active role in social change, not by means of radical intervention or critical reflection, but through the meditation of new forms of public knowledge.” - Nikos Papastergiadis

The global art scene has evolved and expanded significantly over the last thirty years. Major changes including the internationalization of contemporary art, structural shifts in the global art market, and the proliferation of international blockbuster exhibitions and art fairs have surged at a fast pace. With artists, curators, collectors, and galleries developing international reputations during the era of internet and globalization, the art market has shifted from being solely concentrated between the traditional art cities (London and New York City) to expanding territory into cities that have for long been considered as peripheral to the art world. Cities such as Doha, Istanbul, and Johannesburg have suddenly risen as emerging art centers through the proliferation and strengthening of their international art markets. In the American continent, specifically in Latin America, it has been clear that since the 1980's Mexico City has taken the lead by evolving from being considered an emerging peripheral city to its establishment as an international contemporary art center that has become a popular destination among the art world connoisseurs.

Mexico City is at a compelling crossroads between the nationalist model that institutionalized Mexican art and the neoliberal model of privatization.¹ Home of one the largest concentration of Spanish language speakers in the world, the city is one of the

¹ David, “Emerging Art Center: Mexico City,” 196.

important financial centers in the Americas. Regardless of negative stereotypes and reputation, the city has experienced a rise in the migration of skilled professionals working in creative industries. Mexico ranks eighteen in the world as an exporter of creative products, and is the only Latin American country in the top twenty.²

Creative capital is one of the industrial sectors that are essential to Mexico's international image. The country is now over 10, 000 years old and its rich history and cultural heritage is commonly considered as a premise for the development of activities that possess substantial cultural value that are often adapted to Western cultures.

Notwithstanding, it is unfortunate and contradictory that a large part of the population is built of indigenous people living in extreme poverty while their ancestral heritage from the pre-Colombian era is enshrined, praised and marketed in auction houses and museums. One of the principal governmental institutions in Mexico has long been The National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) established in 1939. The main objective of the institution is to assure the preservation, promotion, research and protection of the national heritage from the archeological, anthropological, prehistoric, historical and paleontological perspectives. Since its foundation INAH has played the role of protecting the Mexican cultural patrimony when dealing with cultural exports.

Mexico's privatization of its art and cultural sector lies in the historical fact that the nation has taken advantage of its diverse culture and folklore to build upon the national identity and to establish art institutions. Regardless of being a federal nation, Mexico's economic and political systems are mainly concentrated in the greater Mexico

² Viridiana Mendoza Escamilla, "Capital Creativo, La Otra Palanca Del Crecimiento," Forbes México, November 9, 2013, <https://www.forbes.com.mx/capital-creativo-la-otra-palanca-del-crecimiento/>.

City area, making it one of the largest metropolitan areas in the world. Mexico City itself is annually responsible of generating the country's largest percentage of gross domestic product.

Mexico City's invigorating positioning as a trendy destination is closely tied to the way in which the city has been publicly promoted by the way of its cultural assets and art institutions. The city was also rebranded through a national reform that took place from 2016 to 2017 to change its name from Mexico Distrito Federal (Mexico Federal District) to Ciudad de Mexico (CDMX; Mexico City).

In 1994 after the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the United States and Canada, Mexico entered the neoliberal period under the presidency of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-94). During this time, many neoliberal policies resulted from the decreased welfare state and thus it was created the National Council for Culture and the Arts (CONACULTA). CONACULTA was created for the promotion, support, sponsorship of the national art and cultural industries, and for decades benefited many national art players with a remarkable system of grants that also resulted on promotion of Mexican art exhibited abroad. In 2015 the decentralized body acquired a secretariat status and its official discourse has been that culture is required to repaired the social aspect of the country. On its own words, its general objective is to develop, coordinate and execute public policies that guarantee the full exercise of the cultural rights of people and communities, giving way to an integral development and strengthening of the democratic conviviality in a framework of free expression of ideas,

equitable access to goods and cultural services and the recognition and protection of the diverse identities.³

From an art historical perspective, Mexico has been actively recognized within the art market's global sphere since the decade of the 1920s. During this period, Mexico was being the subject of global headlines thanks to the international recognition of artists like Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros. During the decades that followed, different artistic movements and figures played an important role in shaping what is now CDMX's vibrant contemporary art scene. Mexico City's infiltration into the international contemporary art circuit has a lot to do with Mexican artist Gabriel Orozco exceptional success abroad. The conceptualist style and the "do it yourself" approach that local independent art spaces influenced the artists living and working in Mexico City in the 1990s attracted much interest from the international art community. The creation of alternative spaces welcomed an alternative society and have given space to the internationalization of Mexican art. Parting from this, the artistic public sector has more recently been complemented by a thriving scene promoted that is promoted by private stakeholders.

In the last couple of decades numerous art galleries, owned by locals and foreigners, have opened in CDMX giving place to an expansive gallery scene previously concentrated in a handful of established galleries. The establishment of Zona Maco leader contemporary art fair in Latin America has filled in the need for artistic goods in the region and ignited a creative force booming the production of Mexican Art. However,

³ "About Conaculta - Cultura.gob.mx," accessed February 19, 2022, https://www.cultura.gob.mx/acerca_de_en/.

although the city's art market growth is a positive element it is impossible to ignore the question of where all this money is coming from in a city where socio-economic gaps are deeply pronounced. At the same time the fast growth of Mexico's wealthy class is finding attractive the possibility to invest in contemporary art as a financial asset class.

The establishment of private art collections like the Colección Jumex has nationally increased the value of contemporary art as an investment and vehicle to social status. Owned by mega collector and heir of the Jumex fortune Eugenio López Alonso, the Fundación Jumex Arte Contemporáneo works to preserve and support contemporary art through rising educational awareness and giving special grants and scholarships. The foundation's museum is located in Polanco and next to the Soumaya Museum, a museum and neighborhood development owned by billionaire Carlos Slim.

Without minimizing the relevance of uncountable art historical events, the purpose of this study is to underscore the main factors behind the successful positioning of Mexico City as a contemporary art center. The pillars holding the city's international art market are mainly its growing private collector base, gallery sector, and the local establishment of the most important contemporary art fair in Latin America. These active market players have been dedicated to supporting the city's art scene to achieve global success without setting aside the ability to nurture and innovate the local art community. As a result of their efforts, Mexico City's creative industry has grown tremendously and continues its expansion.

In the preparation of this thesis I have researched and talked with a selection of the most relevant and active stakeholders shaping Mexico City's contemporary art scene.

This selection includes mega collector Eugenio Lopez Alonso, the galleries Kurimanzutto and OMR, and the art fair Zona Maco. The research expands on what their role has been while supporting and filling in the gaps to establish a solid legacy for the local and national art market.

Although from different natures, the aforementioned market players act towards similar goals. Through this paper they are studied in parallel because from the global perspective they encompass the exact representation of what it takes for a city to become a contemporary art center.

Chapter 1

Globalization and the Art Market

“If the arts were important, they were bound to be rejected by large segments of the population, only to be later enshrined at museums and celebrated as revolutionary.” -

John Zarobell

To understand how Mexico City emerged from being a peripheral city to becoming a globalized art center, it is imperative to contextualize the city's art industry growth in correlation to globalization. Cities that are recognized as art centers are also considered as global cities. A global city is defined by the Encyclopedia Britannica as an urban center that enjoys significant competitive advantages and that serve as a hub within a globalized economic system. New York City, Paris, London, and Hong Kong are historically recognized as the cosmopolitan cities by excellence, but a quite different line up of cities that have in the past been considered as peripheral are now reaching towards the globalized city category. This new wave of cities is emerging from the periphery is primarily ignited by globalization, encouraging cross-cultural exchange, financial wealth and the facilitation of migration processes. Today globalization is perceived as a business strategy that integrates markets and international organizations to make business on a global scale.

Market evidence supported by studies continue to prove that the business of art and its market is directly influenced by the phenomenon of globalization. This can be supported by the fact that during the last three decades there has been an increase in the commercialization and consumption of contemporary art across international borders.

Under the art market context globalization allows international visibility and connects artists with a larger collector pool. It also encourages the exchange of goods and services that stimulate several industries while benefiting both art professionals and the public. In fact, within the art market exists a structure that is acknowledge globally and composed by specific commercial circuits formed by the art market players. Auction houses, collectors, dealers, fairs, artists and so forth are the global reference system that rule the art world and is followed by its consumers.

The art market commercializes goods and objects that possess strong symbolism more often than material value, so art works are bot only esteemed for their financial value as an investment good but also for their intangible social and artistic features. Moreover, since it is known that each market possess a special meaning and criteria, the art market is inclined to be physically and culturally localized.⁴ As a consequence, the globalized reference for the art market itself is made of diverse and local markets that are each shaped by its own artists, collectors, and other players to interact with each other. The cross-cultural construct theory is in fact present when analyzing how the art business system is built from a variety of markets that are both physically and culturally localized. This being said can be useful when observing the outcome of the present art market's consumer behavior.

The recent art market consumer behavior analyses indicate that although the United States China, France, and the United Kingdom have historically demonstrated their power as the art market players with the highest contemporary art sales and

⁴ Cordinola, 2015

acquisitions, Latin American and Middle Eastern countries are leveling up to be fair competitors. To be fair, this competition is evidently sponsored by individual and corporate profiles dealing with the world's wealthiest segments which elevate these 'new' countries presence within the art world sphere, backing them up with a fresh visibility. Mexico in general, and specifically its capital Mexico City, is one of the countries considered among this young wave of emerging and recently established international contemporary art centers.

Mexico City in the 1990s: The foundations of an emerging art center

Mexico City has a vibrant community of art collectors among its population that has led to the development of private museums, a thriving gallery scene, and a major art international art fair. The city possesses a major history of artistic production from the modern era and has thrived within the art community for over a century. The country in general is universally recognized for the art movements that took place during the post-revolutionary era of 1940's and 50's, years that were led by artists such as Diego Rivera, Rufino Tamayo, Frida Kahlo, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Jose Clemente Orozco. These generation of artists transcended and became famous for their murals portraying socio-political messages, as well as personal representations of struggle and pain. Scholar agrees that these experts popularized Mexican art on an international level but are also responsible of fomenting a disinterest to collect other types of works during the period they were actively working. Gregorio Luke, former director of California's Museum of Latin-American Art once said that "a lot of people think that Mexican art begins and ends with Frida Kahlo and the muralists". During the late 80's the national art market began to

emerge as prices of works by some national artists began to rise, leading the way to Mexico City's debut as a contemporary art center from the early 1990s onwards, a decade labeled by art historians and scholars as a milestone for the national art scene.

During the nineties, Mexico's artistic production went through a transformation, from the 'Neomexicanismo' movement into a more conceptualist approach. This transformation can be attributed to globalization as Mexico went from having one of the closest economies, to having one of the most open economies in the world. The country's inclusion in the 1994 NAFTA agreement with the United States and Canada marked the arrival of the country into the new era. The treaty became an open door to facilitate the cross-cultural border exchange between the North American countries and located Mexico in the spotlight as an emerging global city that existed far from Hollywood's stereotypes. However, although Mexican contemporary art was created during this period, it was not presented at an international level and its market was not stable. Because of this, several young and promising artists went abroad in the search for better opportunities and were discovered far from their homeland. The arrival of a more conceptualist approach that was far from the traditional Mexican modernist movements during this decade of artistic innovation is attributed to Gabriel Orozco who after being educated in Madrid and New York City began to shape a particular style influenced by conceptualism and dadaism. This style led Orozco to establish the 'Friday Workshop' a space where artists could generate innovative ideas, while giving a voice to the Mexican contemporary art movement that we see today and is represented by artists such as Damián Ortega, Gabriel Kuri, Abraham Cruzvillegas and Dr. Lakra.

Parallel to the period Mexico City saw the opening of OMR and Kurimanzutto, two pioneer galleries devoted to the promotion of contemporary art. Both galleries have found remarkable success and took great responsibility in the promotion of the disciples of Orozco, while beginning to establish a local collector base that began to grow steadily. Among the many collectors shaping the city's collector scene, the one who has been the most important patron for the nurturing and promotion of Contemporary art is Eugenio Lopez Alonso, heir to the Mexican company Jumex. The need for a place of convergence for the galleries and collectors base that began to grow after the 1990s brought the establishment of Zona Maco in 2003 grabbing the art world's attention towards a fresh contemporary art destination. The following chapters go into further detail on each one of the stakeholders working as the pillars of the capital's creative industry.

Chapter 2

The Art of Collecting Art

“For centuries, the sanctuary of a unique art collection has been the secret beacon of endurance for important legacies concerned with posterity. For any legacy to endure, it must provide timeless beauty and continuous inspiration for future imaginations. For these reasons, today's art enthusiast must know that great art is founded upon the love of nature, tradition, innovation, and invention. To secure and honor his or her legacy, he or she should be represented by art that provides timeless beauty and continuous inspiration to all.” - Sam Adoquei

Private collectors are known to be one of the pillars that construct contemporary art history. They are trend-setters, recognize value and promote the public interest and understanding of contemporary art today. Within the art ecosystem collectors are patrons looking to invest and support artists, while helping them establish their reputation and consequently rising their market value. Those collectors particularly interested in fostering the art community through their financial means help stimulate the market economy and shape the way the public perceives art. Recent historical data proves that there are two essential trends behind the evolving art market today: the emergence and growth of the high and ultra-high-net-worth (HNWIs and UHNWIs) individuals' financial class, and the necessity to bring art to the public in crowded, expensive cities. Private art collectors exist and fluctuate between these two financial categories, and often

promote projects that bring art to the public. Until not long ago the biggest concentration of contemporary art collectors was mainly based between the United States and some European countries but nowadays some of the top collectors in the world reside in Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America.

When focusing on the Latin American art market and its growth, Mexico and more specifically its capital Mexico City attract special attention. Mexico City is internationally recognized as one of the most important financial centers in the American continent, and its brilliant creative and cultural industry has been key when portraying the nation's global image. The city has become an emerging economy with an established wealthy class of investors, such as Carlos Slim, who have found a deep interest in collecting art. These collectors are sophisticated and match nicely with the New York City based collector's mantra: collect wisely. They use their wealth and education to implement and further cultural initiatives through outstanding support, mainly due to the public sector's minor efforts to enhance cultural awareness, including institutional funding, and facilitating art acquisitions. Moreover, Mexico City's collectors have given a higher value to art as an investment in Latin America and their practice has become a medium for social status. For the reason this research is focused on Mexico City's contemporary art scene, Eugenio López Alonso is a contemporary art collector that particularly stands out from the others.

Eugenio López Alonso

Eugenio López Alonso is the sole heir to the fortune of Jumex, a Mexican brand of juices and nectars popular in Latin America and Hispanic communities in the United States. His name has become an eminence in the international art scene as a well-known philanthropist, patron for the arts, collector, and the owner of what is considered the best collection of Contemporary Art in Latin America: Colección Jumex.

Eugenio's presence among the boards of the MoCA museum in Los Angeles and The New Museum in NYC as well in art fairs such as Art Basel and Zona Maco, have turned him into a notable figure in the art world and instrumental in the creation of a contemporary art scene in Mexico. His interest in art began at an early age while being surrounded and accessing the world's most important art institutions and collections. His collector era began circa 1990s while first acquiring artworks nationally and then internationally. After amassing a collection of over four hundred pieces, *López* "wanted to create an important collection for his country" and decided to open his to the public. In 2022 Colección Jumex has an estimated worth between \$50 million and \$80 million USD and is made of over 1,800 works of art including pieces by Andy Warhol, Cy Twombly, Jasper Johns, Gabriel Orozco, Dough Aitken, Abraham Cruzvillegas, and Robert Rauschenberg, to name a few. Parallel to his beginnings as a collector buying pieces by local and foreign artists, *López* founded as well Fundación Jumex with the idea of promoting contemporary art through sponsorship, education, research and art projects. The foundation offers educational resources and funds the publication of catalogues and

artist books, projects, scholarships and grants for artists and curators to study abroad. It also supports Mexican artists to participate at international exhibitions and also finances international contemporary traveling exhibitions that otherwise would not be able to be shown in Mexico. Furthermore, each year Fundación Jumex provides annual support to the Museo Rufino Tamayo of Contemporary Art and Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC). These two museums have parallel missions but without private and corporate support it would be difficult to maintain them afloat.

Formally established on March 3, 2001, Fundación Jumex Arte Contemporáneo opened its first doors at Galeria Jumex, a space conditioned within Grupo Jumex juice plant in Ecatepec de Morelos, a municipality in the State of Mexico at the outskirts of Mexico City. Although the art world did not see this as an accessible location for the public, the gallery's location was part of Lopez and his team of art professionals plan to develop a space for experimentation and further development for contemporary art in Mexico. The foundation amassed as well an impressive library of art theory and practice. After catching the eye of the art world for the first decade, the desire for a broader audience and space led the foundation to inaugurate The Museo Jumex on November 19, 2003. The building with an 17,000 square feet exhibition space was designed by David Chipperfield Architects in the Polanco neighborhood of Mexico City, as part of the mixed-use development Plaza Carso and across Museo Soumaya, home to the private classical and modern art collection of Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim.

Colección Museo Jumex

Besides displaying Eugenio's collection, the exhibitions at Colección Jumex encourages a dialogue with the artworks. "The spirit of the collection is (for the collection) to be reinterpreted, to have different viewpoints, perspectives, and readings of the collection." The museums process of assembling these exhibitions start by opening the private collection and selecting the artworks to show. These works are opened to reinterpretation at each exhibition's context depending on its mission, a fact that makes the collection even more attractive to the public and scholars. The collection commissions as well both international and national artists by giving them financial support to continue their artistic practices while giving them the opportunity to include their new artworks at the museum's exhibitions. Colección Jumex has exalted Mexico in the international art scene by allowing numerous exhibitions from the museum to travel abroad, displaying at museums in cities such as Glasgow, Vienna, Bogota, and Buenos Aires. The Bass Museum of Art in Miami Beach, Silvia Karman Cubiñá has mentioned that "it is a significant commitment by Jumex Collection to expand beyond Mexico's borders to become a major collection in the global art scene." Since the creation of the collection and museum, it has become clear to Lopez that a collection for contemporary art in Mexico requires education and public programs to understand and promote the art, and create a framework that will support its creation.

Mexico City's emergence as an art center has greatly been fostered by the establishment of the Colección Museo Jumex and Lopez has been and continues to be

one of the key players behind the city's successful cultural growth. The opening of the space came to fulfill the artists latent need for an outlet of expression, since prior to it a system for contemporary art in Mexico was non-existent. As a result of Lopez Alonso's efforts to enhance Mexico City's art scene in the global sphere, the local art market now attracts a numerous amount of established and new collectors from Mexico and all over the world to acquire Mexican contemporary art. Curator Pedro Alonzo has stated that "without Eugenio Lopez there would not be a significant interest in collecting art in Mexico. Eugenio, through his extravagant lifestyle and largess has made collecting not only acceptable but cool and prestigious and others in Mexico are beginning to follow his lead."

Following Lopez's steps, galleries, alternative spaces, and centers have opened their doors in the city's neighborhoods of Colonia Roma and Condesa, which are compared to New York City's Soho and Chelsea in the East Village. Other collectors like Boris Hirmas, Cesar Cervanes, and Agustin Coppel have also amassed valuable contemporary art collections in Mexico but none has reached the level of commitment and focus of Jumex.

CIAC

Behind Eugenio Lopez Alonso and following his steps as a collector, Agustin and Isabel Coppel founded the non-profit association, Isabel and Agustín Coppel Collection (CIAC), A. C. With the intention of their collection venturing into the public sphere, the collection began to take form in 1992 with Mexican modern art but soon focused its

attention towards contemporary art. The collection includes Abraham Cruzvillegas, Gabriel Orozco, Damian Ortega, Francis Alÿs, Carlos Amorales, Mélanie Smith, Richard Avedon, Dan Flavin, Moholy-Nagy, Thomas Ruff, Cindy Sherman and Bill Viola. CIAC main objective is to generate dialogue between the public, the artwork, institutions, and the art community main agents. As a civil association the collection has sponsored national researchers to study contemporary art while supporting exhibitions, publications, and special projects focused on contemporary art practices.

Chapter 3

The Art Galleries

“One of the most important features for investors to remember is that there is no such thing as ‘the art market’. It is de facto name given to the aggregation of many independently moving and unique submarkets that are defined by artists and genres, and that often behave in significantly different ways.” - Clare McAndrews

The art market is one of the most established received ideas in the art world. Its characteristics and mechanisms constitute an extensive construction and its singularity is often questioned. Some cultural economists have focused the scope of their research to how the art market creates value based on the synchronicities of supply and demand. Others talk about how the art market prices interact accordingly to the equities market, or how globalization has affected the contemporary art market. All of these meaningful economic analyses have been based on the fundamental conception of the classic definition of what a market is offered by economics: a market is defined as an abstraction in which buyers and sellers meet to exchange goods or services. Therefore, all the different art consumers, art auctions, dealers, artists, museums to patrons, are actively engaged in the art market.

When speaking of the term “primary market”, it refers to art galleries as the traditional unit of art consumption in today’s art world and exist in both the primary and secondary market. Gallerists and dealers — two different terms that encompass their peculiarities and are often used interchangeably— play one of the most important roles in

the art ecosystem. They play a leading role in the art market system and their main function is to build bridges that connect artists and collectors, serving as the common thread that holds the contemporary art world together. Art gallerists take care of supporting living artists by nurturing their careers and furthering their popularity through their promotion and cultivation among collectors, and most importantly by establishing prices for their marketability. To this it can be added that art market experts attain and agree on prices through a system of mutual acceptance that results on the art market. Galleries are private businesses and those who operate within the primary market often succeed financially thanks to their engagement in the secondary market, or the reselling of works by “their artists”. Well-connected and established galleries have the advantage of possessing the discretion and knowledge of who owns what among private collectors, who most of the time favor confidentiality and privacy protection. Although galleries have long existed since the 19th century dealing with modern or classical art, a substantial number of them are now solely focused on the promotion of contemporary art in the past couple of generations. It is viable to say that the amount of contemporary art galleries in the world has quickly risen and that fairs and franchise models are factors to the success of the most important ones. Worth mentioning is that the main component of the contemporary gallery is the persistence of the cultural construct of the dealer/gallerist as a pillar of the art market. To understand better how the dealer/gallerist model has evolved, it is important to analyze the rise of the contemporary dealer in an art historical context. The role of the modern art dealer emerged in the nineteenth century to further the artist innovations that were created during an era of great transformations. The first

independent dealers were specialists on understanding the full range of artists reproduction of their time and were selective on which artists were represented by their galleries. Dealer Paul Durand-Ruel initiated a model that promoted the work of undesirable artists by turning his awareness of the historical importance of contemporary artists into a triumphant business. This modeled was followed by other famous dealers like the Ambrose Vollard, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler and the famous Duvet brothers, Henry Joseph and Joseph Joel Duveen. Later on, from a neoclassical perspective the art world has Theo Van Gogh, Leo Castelli, Mary Boone and Larry Gagosian, the ultimate contemporary mega dealer of our time. Although New York City is still considered the home of the largest number of contemporary art galleries, followed by London, there is a large amount of galleries opening in emerging art centers that have risen with strong popularity and financial success in the recent years.

In Mexico City, the growth of the local contemporary art gallery industry sector has been exceptional and reached a top tier level since the 1980s. The city has experienced an increase in the number of galleries opening mainly in the neighborhoods of La Condesa, Colonia Roma, San Miguel Chapultepec, and Polanco. Despite the number of long-standing galleries, including the GAM (Galeria de Arte Moderno) known as the first commercial gallery in Mexico founded in 1935, Kurimanzutto and OMR are two galleries that deserve particular attention.

Kurimanzutto

The bustling and vibrant Mexico City art scene is the primary home to Kurimanzutto, which has steadily become an international reference in Latin America and in the world of contemporary art. It all comes back to the late 1990's. The idea of a gallery was first conceived in New York City by Mónica Manzutto, José Kuri and artist Gabriel Orozco. Manzutto and Kuri had moved to New York to go after their master's degrees in public policy and cultural studies. Orozco was gaining momentum in his artistic career but wanted to return home, and no gallery could represent him in Mexico. In addition to a lack of gallery spaces dedicated to contemporary art, in Mexico there was a lack of institutional support for the upcoming generation of artists that were exploring new media and styles. That is when he suggested Kuri and Manzutto open a gallery in Mexico, and despite the pair's lack of experience in the industry they prepared for it. Monica learned about the insider's system of the gallery business at Marian Goodman, which was Orozco's gallery at that time, and by 1999 the trio was back in their homeland. Their vision was clear: the aim was for the gallery to consist of a nomadic space that could evolve and adapt around each specific project. Perhaps this idea has been part of their success since it worked as a catapult to position Kurimanzutto internationally. The gallery's first exhibition opened August 21st of 1999 and was titled "Market Economy". The show took place at a booth on the local market and featured pieces by the gallery's artists that were created with materials available in the market itself. Each artwork was sold for the equivalent of other market goods and lasted a little less than 24 hours. As years went by, the nomadic gallery continued having successful exhibitions that initiated

conversations between the artist and the public. Whenever Kurimanzutto's artists had produced enough work, the gallery would run a show in uncommon spaces and soon they became popular for their party's and critical dialog. The financial freedom that came with not having a fixed space helped for the gallery to present itself internationally by establishing alliances, starting conversations and exchanging knowledge that would transcend borders. 2000 was the beginning of the century and Kurimanzutto began participating at international fairs, which led to the 2003 Venice Biennale. The gallery's artists gained exposure after Gabriel Orozco was invited to curate a show, "The Everyday Altered," that featured the works by the Friday Workshop artists.

Ever since then, their continued success has become history. As the gallery kept growing, in 2006 they occupied a warehouse in the Colonia Condesa which served as a project space and workshop. Later, just as with change comes evolution, Kurimanzutto opened the doors to its main gallery space in Mexico City's San Miguel Chapultepec neighborhood in 2008. The main gallery space is far from the stereotypical white cube gallery so commonly embraced in New York and London. Mónica and José wanted the gallery to be in a space that resembled Mexico's weather, economy, and politics so they decided to opt for their famous current space. Far from the stereotypical white cube gallery so commonly embraced in New York and London, Mónica and José wanted the gallery to be in a space that resembled Mexico's weather, economy and politics. They opt to transform an old lumberyard dating from the 1950s and adapted by the architect Alberto Kalach for the main gallery space. The building structure was renovated into a continuous exhibition space that delights its visitors with the original wooden ceilings

and natural light. Kurimanzutto invites an open dialogue to research and critical thinking and differentiates itself from other commercial galleries by presenting risky projects. A decade after the inauguration of the Mexico City space, Kurimanzutto opened its doors in New York City in May 2018 to a project space that encourages stronger connections to the art world that has evolved together with the gallery. This space is an extension to the space in Mexico and acts as a meeting point with projects in North America. The gallery now represents some of the most acclaimed Mexican contemporary artists and has embraced international artists like Pavel Althamer from Poland, Adrian Villar Rojas from Argentina and Thai artist Rikrit Taravanija. Though their clientele was primarily international collectors at first, that has changed since Kurimanzutto's artists have secured presence in renown international exhibition spaces. It is important to highlight the fact that part of Mexico City's success incurring into the international art circuit much to do with the success abroad of Gabriel Orozco and his becoming figure in Mexican society, which subsequently called further attention to Kurimanzutto. Orozco's and his group of colleagues from the Friday Workshop generated great interest from the international art community thanks to the "do it yourself" approach they embraced. This idea was present at almost all the Mexico City's independent spaces in the nineties and impacted the artistic practice of foreign artists living and working in the city. What's more, Kurimanzutto's history has demonstrated how the growth of UHNWs and HNWI is a major trend in the evolution of the art market in emerging global cities.

OMR

The humbling and brave origins of OMR (Ortiz Monasterio Riestra) gallery are an example of perseverance and hard work. The gallery was first founded in 1983 by Jaime Riestra and Patricia Ortiz Monasterio. Originally, the young couple was financially restricted and with a short amount of money decided to open a frame store. today, almost four decades after, OMR is one of Mexico City's largest and longest-running blue chip contemporary galleries. Since its beginning OMR has been a main influence and reference of the arts in Mexico, always aiming to represent and further avant-garde artists that have become some of the referential points of the Mexican contemporary art scene. The gallery represents both emerging as well as established contemporary artists and is the exclusive representative of the estates of artists Luis Ortiz Monasterio, Alberto Gironella and Adolfo Riestra, three Mexican artists that were key figures in the shopping of the city's artistic scene. OMR today not only represents national international acclaimed artists like Pia Camil, Gabriel Rico, Jorge Mendez Blake, Gabriel Ortiz Torres, Torolab and Jose Davila, also international artists such as the Spanish artist Ana Montiel, Candida Höfer from Germany, French Yann Gerstberger and the collaborative contemporary art practice duo Troika, formed by Eva Rucki, Conny Freyer, and Sebastien Noel. It is worth mentioning that all of the mentioned artists are already established within the global art scene, yet special praise can be given to Pia Camil. Not only her work has been exhibited in the United States, Colombia, Germany, and France, but has also been subject to research, art historical and curatorial analyses and featured in site specific interventions across the globe. In 2019, her performance piece "Here Comes the

Sun” was presented at the Salomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City. Camil, who has made a name for herself and is known for her textile and ready-made intervention stylistic approach used secondhand tee shirts as a visual medium for thinking about the ways that global consumer culture, contemporary trade routes, and immigration impact society.⁵ “Here Comes the Sun” became part of the Guggenheim Museum’s permanent collection and was commissioned by the museum’s Latin American Circle as well as the East Harlem Culture Collective and the Queens Museum. This relevant event was furthered and made possible thanks to the full support of OMR and of course generated international attention to the Mexican art scene.

Another Mexican contemporary art figure promoted by OMR that has earned the international art circuits attention is Torolab. Torolab is a collective workshop and laboratory of contextual studies that identifies situations of phenomena of interest for research, basing the studies in the realm of lifestyles to better grasp the idea of quality of life. Founded and directed by Raul Cardenas Osuna in 1995, the collective has been exhibited both nationally and internationally in institutions that include the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, Museum of Contemporary Art of San Diego, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Museum of Contemporary Art of Sydney, and the Havana Biennial. Cardenas’ work has elevated Mexico’s image by also receiving Harvard University’s Cultural Agents Initiative in 2011. The essence of Torolab lies on how it is a laboratory of spatial investigations, art and contextualized living phenomena. Depending

⁵ Artist website, piacamil.me/about

on the project, the artist invites people to develop the project and all together become Torolab, always intending to propose, not protest.⁶

OMR participates annually at a long list of International art fairs including Zona Maco, Art Basel Switzerland, Art Brussels in Belgium, Frieze, and Art Basel Miami. In 2009 the gallery opened el52, a project space that aims to generate a new platform for younger artists and basis for the gallery structure. OMR has also been a loyal support to other emerging galleries in Mexico City, such as Masa, a nomadic gallery dedicated to the exhibition of collectible design and fine art. The gallery is also one of the strongest supporters of Sotheby's Institute of Art Mexico City Campus and in 2022 inaugurated Lago Algo, recently the most influential contribution of OMR to the capital's art scene and the art world in general. Lago Algo emerged as a project as a result from the pandemic crisis of Covid-19 that surged at the end of 2019. The project came from the need to reimagine the world situation and rethink people's relationship with public space, as well as to rethink humanity's consumption models and relationship with nature. The cultural venue is led by OMR as a hybrid, collaborative projects that seeks to generate existential reflections on contemporaneity and humanity's tole in the future of earth through the arts and culture.⁷

⁶ Gallery website, omr.art/history

⁷ [Cultural center website, lago.com.mx](http://Cultural%20center%20website,%20lago.com.mx)

Emerging Contemporary Art Spaces in Mexico City

Among the numerous galleries and art spaces in Mexico City, Terreno Baldio is a contemporary gallery and workshop space for artists and their special projects and commissions. Established in 2005 by Eduardo Pier y Teran, the gallery began as an office dedicated to manage the work by the established Mexican sculptor Javier Marin. No almost two decades later, Terreno Baldio is a fully fledged exhibition space that works with a range of local and international contemporary artists like German visual artist Anette Kuhn, Javier Hinojosa, Aron Demetz, Francisco Esnayra, and Hector Velazquez. The gallery also supports its artists on the international stage by participating in major art fairs such as ARCO, Madrid; ARTE BA, Buenos Aires; Bâlelatina, Basel; and Zona Maco, Mexico City.⁸

Another emerging artistic and cultural independent space in the city is JO-HS, a multifunctional studio, exhibition space, and home in the San Miguel Chapultepec neighborhood, founded by Danish curator Elisabeth Johs during the end of 2021. The space promotes the production and exhibition of art, and offers studio spaces as well as rooms for rent to local and international artists working on a variety of media, an experimental exhibition program, and a collaborative space for events and happenings. JO-HS mission is to encourage an environment where everyone from artists, curators, writers, editors, cultural agents, and art enthusiasts can come together to realize ideas and share narratives through art.⁹

⁸ [Gallery website, terrenobaldio.com](http://Gallery%20website,%20terrenobaldio.com)

⁹ [Art center website, jo-hs.com](http://Art%20center%20website,%20jo-hs.com)

In addition, Mexico City has seen a recent trend on the opening of artist residencies that encourage the formative years of young emerging artists before being signed by galleries. The two largest international artist residency programs in the city today are SOMA and Casa Lu. Soma, founded in 2009, is a non profit organization initiated by a group of artists that joined forces to produce a unique platform in the cultural field. The non profit is a space to reflect and open the conversation about national and international art events and its mission is to encourage dialogue, collaboration and peaceful confrontation between cultural producers and artists from different generations and backgrounds. The aesthetic, political and social consequences of art production are analyzed in SOMA and offered three programs throughout the year: SOMA's Academic Program, SOMA Summer, and SOMA Wednesdays, offering bilingual education, as well as public, free, weekly programming.

Chapter 4

A Door to the World: Zona Maco and the Satellite Fairs

“I don’t feel good about the proliferation of art fairs. I don’t think any gallerist does feel good about it, but there’s no avoiding participating in it, because it’s now an important part of the market. The paradigm has changed. It has changed the habits of the way public engages with art. Although there are still many collectors who value galleries highly as places where they have a chance to see work in depth, fewer people come to the galleries. Many prefer to shop at fairs. They are often the same people who buy at auction. That’s not always true, it’s not a black and white situation, but business has taken over the art world.” Marian Goodman

Art fairs are the epitome of the art world facing globalization. On the most basic level, an art fair is a trade show: a pop-up free trade zone dedicated to the promotion and exhibition of art where favorable tax domains are facilitated. They have transformed the nature of the art trade becoming platforms where all aspects of the market converge — galleries, collectors, curators, and artists — and have enhanced the art economy by stimulating the rise of a specialized industry dedicated to art insurance, international shipping, customs, and installation.

Within the art market, art fairs represent the evolution of the idea on how art should be exhibited and accelerate the market’s activity through creative forms of cultural distribution. While not all of them focus on contemporary art, most dedicate a major part of the exhibition spaces to the category. They serve as incubators for contemporary art

that safeguard its monetary value and accelerate the market during the twenty-first century. Spanish author and curator Paco *Barragán* argues that the art fair effect produces one of the most bizarre juxtapositions of cultural signifiers to be found in our current era of globalization, as their strategic proliferation to global cities ignites local economies and allow the cross-fertilization of ideas that develop in art and the business of selling it. Although their international expansion and popularity has been dynamic in the last couple of decades, art fairs have existed for long now. The first commercial art fair in the world is Art Basel, which was established in 1970 in Basel, Switzerland. After its foundation, the creation of countless art fairs has followed with them being Frieze, FIAC, TEFAF, ARCO Madrid, among more. In the United States, the major fairs that are held annually are Art Basel Miami Beach, which takes place in December since 2002, and The Armory Show in New York City founded in 1994.

Moreover, political speaking there has been a notorious trend during the last twenty years where the art world has somehow shifted preferences and expanded into its ‘peripheries.’ Western museum curators and collectors are expanding their acquisition strategies and are no longer giving preference to buying art by white male artists from euro-centered dealers in the aim to reach global profiles. In a time defined by globalization, connectivity and post-post-colonialism, institutions do well to shift their gaze towards the so called “peripheral centers.” Looking into Mexico City’s, the Mexican capital is a perfect example of the new art world dynamics, this time highlighting how art fairs are being established in former peripheries.

Since 2002 the leading contemporary art fair in Latin American has been Zona Maco, taking place every year during February in Mexico City. Founded by *Zélika* Garcia, the fair has without doubt contributed to Mexico City's establishment as a global art center. The platform aims to encompass and promote the art, design, antiques, and photography sectors in Mexico and now holds four events annually at Centro Citi Banamex in Mexico City: *México Arte Contemporáneo* brings together leading and emerging national and international art galleries; *Diseño*, established in 2011, exhibits furniture, jewelry, textiles, limited editions, and decorative objects; *Salón*, created in 2014, exhibits antiques; *Foto* that features vintage, modern and contemporary photography since 2015. Although the highly international, Latin American art predominates while adding cosmopolitan gestures. In terms of gallery representation, Zona Maco has for years been the most geographically diverse fair with 42% from Europe, 19% from North America, and 36% from Latin America.

The fair follows the same model established by Art Basel in terms of concept, organization, and the implementation of a programming at its main location and other venues around the city that are tailored to the local context of Mexico City. During the week the fair takes place, many events are held throughout the city, attracting the interest of the international and local audience to its vibrant cultural scene that makes it an art destination in vogue.

Analyzed as a business, Zona Maco's success is based on three essential elements: a history that leads to the valuation of artistic culture and patronage, an emerging

economy that produces enough wealth among the upper segments of the population, and a local art market supported by an active art-collecting clientele. From the financial perspective the fair attracts millions of dollars into the Mexican capital each year as a tourist attraction for a certain type of individual, profiled as mostly educated and cultured that posse's stable financial means. Zona Maco is important on the international art map mainly because of Mexico City's well-established artistic culture, helping it to remain a major destination for artists and collectors and managing to sustain the capitals contemporary art boom that began long before the 2020 global pandemic.

Additionally, to Zona Maco as the main art fair attraction, Mexico City now holds two satellite art fairs that have become fair competitors: Material Art Fair and Salón ACME. The term satellite fair has been given to the subdivision of smaller fairs that take place parallel to major fairs during their art week. These so-called satellite fairs cluster around the main events, offering opportunities to less established galleries, nonprofits, and collectives to exhibit, stage, perform, and sell beyond the scope of the principal stellar fairs. Most of them have developed as well as franchises and during each iteration they demonstrate their growth and expansion, with some of them currently attracting as many visitors as the major fairs they satellite around.

Salón ACME first edition took place in 2013, two years after the inauguration of Museo Soumaya, and during the same year Museo Fundacion Coleccion Jumex opened its doors, making it a favorable year to serve as a fresh proposal to the art players that were focusing attention on Mexico City's explosion of creativity. The platform portrays

itself as created by and for artists, seeking to give visibility, impulse and dissemination to creators that develop their work nationally and abroad. It holds six different sectors, them being: Open Call, La Bodega De Acme, Guest State, Guest Projects, Editorial Room, and Public Program. Each year Salón ACME is managed and promoted by Base Proyectos, behind the event's general conceptualization, and Archipiélago, that provides the fair's headquarters, leads fundraising, sponsorships and its promotion as a project that seeks to generate cultural change through entertainment.

Chapter 5

Art in the Margins: The Dark Side of the Art Market and its Issues

“The art market is global now, and theres becoming more of an international consensus about what constitutes good art.” Larry Gagosian

It is no news that the art trade is the last major unregulated market in the world. Questions around what drives the art market, its regulations and who has the say in the system have risen amidst the past few years convergence of contemporary art as the hottest investment and financial class of the moment. It is inevitably to question the system’s modus operandi that has been functional for so long. Particularly in the contemporary art market, monetary value is constantly fluctuating, a fact that makes auction houses, galleries and private dealers to have quick turnarounds. Julian Stallabrass, an academic from the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, England, wrote in a London Review of Books in 2013 that “the more art is useful for investment, tax scams, money laundering, and entry to the elite,” the more it “parades its principled uselessness” at art fairs. The academic’s polemic comment demonstrating his stance toward the global art market reflects real instances of the dishonest behaviors and attitudes of some who consider art as a movable commodity with subjective value.¹⁰ This is unfortunately backed up with evidence from Deloitte’s 2018 Art and Finance Report. Deloitte states that “connoisseurs and collectors may not view rare artwork as commodities.” “But frequently, that’s how cultural objects are perceived in the marketplace and illegitimate

¹⁰ <https://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2013/october/manifest-opulence>

investors and businesses see additional value in these objects: the means to mark, move, and leverage ill-gotten proceeds.”¹¹

The number of high-profile cases that involve both buyers and sellers in reportedly art market transactions that involve money laundering to avoid legal sanctions, hide the source behind dirty money, and lack of provenance checks has increased at a global level tremendously. Case in point is that in July of 2020 the United States Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations published a report that argues how the art market’s lack of regulations and transparency allowed Russian oligarchs associated with Russian President Vladimir Putin to acquire \$18 million of art through a shell company, while avoiding United States sanctions on financially corrupt elements in Russia.¹² Moreover, in September of 2020, the global financial community was shaken by the FinCEN (Financial Crimes Enforcement Network) files leak, which detailed documents reporting over \$2 trillion worth of suspicious transactions taking place via major global banks. The leaks were later connected to art and antiques acquisitions at major auction houses through a shell company register in London and Hong Kong that had suspicious transactions involved with alleged antiques and art traffickers. In a way thanks to globalization this has been able to be discover, but at the same time globalization is a factor that has facilitated.

¹¹ <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/us/Documents/finance/us-five-insights-into-the-art-market-and-money-laundering.pdf>

¹² <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2020-07-29%20PSI%20Staff%20Report%20-%20The%20Art%20Industry%20and%20U.S.%20Policies%20that%20Undermine%20Sanctions.pdf>

Informal economy and offshore are two terms that encapsulate the dark and hidden side of the international art trade. Informal economy is the part of the economy that is not recorded or regulated, and “offshore” can be summed up as the exchange of assets beyond the authorities that regulate them. Because of its lack of regulations, the art market is a key factor within a large network of the distribution and accumulation of capital in the world. These activities are part of the hidden mechanisms that also allow the art market to flourish. Moreover money laundering through art has been an issue for longer than it has been recorded. Criminals around the world have in many occasions found a safe refuge within the unregulated art market, where million dollar sales are commonly seen as regular affairs. In places like Hong Kong, wealthy individuals are often responsible of purchasing art at inflated prices abroad and have the balance deposited into offshore accounts. In Brazil, some have turned their illicit money into outstanding art collections. In Mexico, a few have stated that the art trade is the right place where money laundering can happen without a hassle.

In Mexico City money laundering and art exist somewhere between the two invisible economy forms mentioned above. Although it obviously is not the only art center dealing with the issue, Mexico City and Mexico’s unfortunate drug war situation has underscored the issue in the last two decades. Many local dealers have complained about the government’s recent regulations and laws intending to uncover the profits behind the lucrative world of Mexican drug trafficking. It is now demanded that businesses disclose about the identity of their customers and how much they are spending, which is completely against the ultra-confidential nature of the art business.

The anti money laundering regulations are supported by those who fear an economy flooded by dollars coming from the drug lord and cartels, but Mexico City gallerists have felt the law's collateral damage. The anti money laundering law was passed in 2012 with the intention to limiting the use of cash and requiring to give detailed information from customers to the government. The law, which states that the purchase of items created than \$15,510 dollars can no longer be completed in cash, applies to several industries that have been awash by narco-activities and include armored car dealerships, jewelry stores, pawnshops, casinos, and art galleries. Furthermore, all large sales are required to be reported to the Mexican Ministry of Finance. Without making any generalizations, it is broadly known that in Mexico, a large portion of the population lives from informal economical activities in the cash based world of unpaid taxes, undeclared income, and vendors without licenses. Yet, the result of these regulations have affected both auction houses and galleries in the Mexican capital. Business has without a doubt seen ups and downs because collectors feel uncomfortable and observed. The corruption within government officials is a latent issue that scare clients of having their information being sold or leaked, putting them in danger if the government is aware of their million dollar spend in art. Since dealers and gallerists working on Mexican territory can not guarantee that the information of each collector will be confidently secured, consumers who are able to buy abroad will do it without hesitation. This is a disadvantage for the art scene in Mexico City.

Many dealers convey that the anti money laundering law is a necessity due to the scope of the general issue but it could be rectified to make it easier to manage. Some

galleries have also suggested that the art market in Mexico can evolve into a market without cash like in other parts of the world. The implementation of anti money laundering laws expects that collectors will make sure they are acquiring art in a legal, ethical way

Conclusion

“One of the most transformatory things in the last two decades has been the way in which the thematics of visual representation have been massively rewritten from the margins, from the excluded; and this is precisely the content being played out within that global circuit of cultural production.” - Stuart Hall

The rise and establishment of peripheral cities as international contemporary art centers has been an evident trend in the last couple of decades. For instance, Mexico City, Doha, Istanbul, and Johannesburg are only a handful of metropolis that now possess well built art markets that have positioned all of them as popular destinations for the international art community. The contemporary art scene in each of these cities has been evolving tremendously in recent years and they all in fact deserve individual case studies to make them justice. This shift in the art world is a tendency that is particularly attributed to the globalization phenomenon experienced by the world we live in today, which has increased interconnectedness between people and facilitated cross-cultural exchange beyond unimaginable borders. For the art world, globalization together with the era of internet and digital technology have become the key factors foregrounding the cultural awareness and public interest on contemporary art, especially in locations where art has lacked popularity throughout history. Despite the broadness that involves the effects of globalization in the global art scene and the establishment of new art centers far from New York City and London, this study addresses a carefully crafted niche question that narrows the scope of the research to Mexico City as a global art destination and its

thriving art scene. Moreover the question that demands this study's attention is: What are the key factors behind the successful positioning of Mexico City as an international contemporary art center?

Although the world of art functions thanks to the relentless work of many art world players including curators, auction houses, appraisers, communicators, educators and so forth, the market has inserted itself into the social relations of the art world through three key factors or players: private collectors, galleries and fairs. To say the least, these business driven stakeholders have been crucial in the case of Mexico City's establishment within the global art sphere. This being said, a series of questions arises: Who are exactly the collectors, galleries and fairs lighting up the city's artistic community? What have been their attributions to the art market in Mexico? In which way are they been participating at the art community's international level? And How has Mexico city brought awareness to its dynamic art scene to the international art world connoisseurs?

This research seeks to address and answer these aforementioned questions, the reader will learn through this pages the history and mission of Mexico City's most powerful contemporary art market players: collector Eugenio Lopez Alonso, the two most relevant galleries: Kurimanzutto, OMR, and Zona Maco art fair. In The previous chapters I have attempted to emphasize the importance each of those players roles and the way in which they have built upon their legacy while encouraging change and awareness to Mexico City's thriving contemporary art scene. Throughout the preparation of this thesis

it has been recognized that Mexico's capital's contemporary art scene has been boosted thanks to the influence of its numerous museums, galleries, and the growing number of private art collectors. Chilean poet Pablo Neruda once referred to Mexico City as 'the touchstone of America'¹³ and now decades later any tourist visiting the capital of Mexico can confirm this to be true. As one of the most populous cities on earth, Mexico City possess a vibrant design, architecture, food, and fashion scene that only adds to its cultural industry. Even though the establishment of Mexico City as an art center is often referred to as a boom, truth is that its artistic community has prospered for more than a century. Historically beginning in the 1920s with the muralist movement led by Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Jose Clemente Orozco, via the 1950s with the Rupture movement painters, through the conceptualist artists of the 'Friday Workshop' in the 1990s, the city's contemporary art scene has thrived for long. What has changed and benefited Mexico City over the last couple of decades in a positive way is its artistic infrastructure, as a large gallery sector and an significant fair , Zona Maco, have emerged thanks to an ever fast growing private art collector base. To this it is important mention that other two key factors behind this growth are the political stability and economic prosperity that surround the capital. One of Mexico City's local gallerists Teofilo Cohen, founder and director of the gallery Proyectos Monclova mentioned during an interview that 'One of Mexico City's strengths is that the rules of the art game are less fixed here than they are in more established art hubs. The focus in this city, for a long time, used to be on traditional work in traditional places...Awareness of contemporary art has

Pablo Neruda, "México", 1940

developed [only relatively recently - which] has allowed more room for experimentation, the unstructured and the unexpected.’ To this Cohen adds that the era on internet has also allowed for Mexicans to connect to art world trends and discourse like never before.¹⁴

Now that Mexico City is positioned within the global art community as an international art center, it can be concluded that this fact has resulted mainly because of the influence of private contemporary art collector Eugenio Lopez Alonso, Zona Maco, and its two leading contemporary art galleries Kurimanzutto and OMR. Lopez Alonso’s spectacular collection of contemporary art and his efforts to share it widely with the community led him to not only establish a foundation that every year helps dozens of national creatives through grants and educational programs, but also to open his own private collector museum, Museo Jumex, which is home to his extensive world-class collection and on view to the public.

Ever since its founding in 2003, Zona Maco became a destination art fair that every year attracts thousands of cultural tourism to the city. Thanks to Zelika Garcia and her team of experts, Zona Maco was able to locate Mexico City on the international art worlds annual art fair agendas. This milestone was possible under the guidance of Ana Sokoloff, a high profile art advisor specialized in Latin American and Contemporary Art based in New York City. Zona Maco has been keen to promote art collection among the upper classes in Mexico while hosting events and educational programs parallel to the week the fair takes place. This is also complemented during the year by Zona Maco’s VIP

¹⁴ “Art Cities: How A Rich Gallery Sector and a Growing Collector Base Have Boosted Mexico City: Christie’s,” <https://www.christies.com/features/art-cities-mexico-city-10284-1.aspx>.

program, which provides special access to museum and cultural institutions, private collection tours, galleries, and year-round invitations to similar events, which it makes it an attractive offer for visitors coming from abroad.

What's more, Kurimanzutto and OMR have together with Lopez Alonso and Zona Maco benefited the public by encouraging the exhibition and promotion of contemporary art in Mexico by both national and international artists. The role each gallery play within Mexico City's art scene is crucial, as they have taken care of watching over the artists careers while supporting their professional development and ideas. These galleries have encouraged to encourage international consumption of art in Mexico and also have positioned themselves as global references in the art community. Kurimanzutto having opened an additional space in New York City and representing some of the most famous contemporary Mexican artists of all times, have come to be present in most of the international elite fairs and biennials, including supporting Mexico's pavilion during several Venice Biennial's. Similarly, OMR has since the 1980s established itself as one of Latin America's leading galleries, having presented record sales by both emerging and established artists throughout the years. OMR has been directed by a group of brilliant directors that had made the gallery a star among fellow national and international galleries. Recently the gallery inaugurated Lago Algo, a cultural destination right in the heart of Mexico City's Chapultepec Forest. The center is a cultural space opened to the public that works as a hybrid and collaborative project that aims to generate communal retrospections and reflections about the future of planet earth through art and culture.

In conclusion, my research shows how it has been the private initiative, supported by economic and political stability, and building on a country with a millennial cultural history, that has sustained and strengthened the careers of local artists, collectors, and curators. They as well have promoted the awareness of art in a city that was not until recent considered a destination for the international art world, elevating the Mexico City's art market as well as tourism and financial revenue. These art market players as the factors behind the successful positioning of Mexico City as a contemporary art center. Since their beginnings, they have faced many challenges such as an inexistent local and national art system, scarcity on specialized art professionals, and perhaps negative stereotypes implemented by western cultures, but has overcome throughout the last thirty years by housing outstanding international exhibitions, events, and innovative projects. Thanks to them, the international audience has brought awareness to the Mexican capital and the city is finding its place and increasing its audience among the global art community, The common goal of these influencing factors is to strengthen the local art industry and continue Mexico City's growth and positioning in the international community. This fascinating art world shifts are to be possible through the technological advantages that have been facilitated through globalization. Yet, the forthcoming reforms and Mexico City's continuous thrive as an international contemporary art center lay in the hands of artists and everyone inspired by them.

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