

How Can Curators in Today's Art World Help Emerging Chinese Artists to Increase the Commercial Value of Their Artworks?

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Abstract: The changing landscape of the art world drives consumer preferences, and emerging trends in art and technology. While the art world is constantly evolving, there are many emerging artists, but very few of them have made it to the top. One of the challenges that hinder the emerging artist community is finding buyers for their artworks and connecting with galleries, fairs and exhibitions to increase their commercial value of the artworks. Although the Asian market has grown and gained real recognition compared to previous decades, it is surprising that China's emerging artists are still struggling to sell their works in the industry. In this study, I aim to explore how curators play a role in dealing with these challenges. The research question is: how can curators help China's emerging artists create commercial value of their artworks in today's art world? This research finds, it has been found that curators can use brand ecology theory to help emerging artists solve this dilemma, providing them with services throughout their career development lifecycle, including curators play an important role in connecting artists with consumers, and branding artists and their works, by diverse methods. They include publishing the artist's creative process and artworks on different social media, designing compelling stories, helping emerging artists analyze art market trends and consumer behavior, collaborating with commercial galleries to incubate emerging artists, participating in art space exhibitions, collaborating with famous brands to launch co-branded products, and designing and selling peripheral merchandise of the artwork.

Keywords: Co-branding; Curating; Emerging Chinese Artists; Commercialization Capacity; Sustainability in Arts.

1. Introduction

The art world is constantly evolving, with new artists emerging and trends in technology shaping how art is created, consumed and distributed. However, while there are many talented emerging artists, few of them are able to achieve success within the competitive art market. One of the key challenges facing emerging artists is how to increase the commercial value of their artworks and connect with galleries, fairs and exhibitions to gain recognition and access to buyers. This challenge is even more pronounced for Chinese emerging artists.

In this study, we seek to explore how curators can play a role in helping Chinese emerging artists enhance the commercial value of their artworks and gain recognition in the contemporary art market. Curators are cultural intermediaries who help shape the tastes and preferences of the art audience through their selection and presentation of artworks in exhibitions and galleries. They play a crucial role in identifying emerging artists with unique perspectives, creating connections within art worlds, and branding artists and their works, thereby enhancing the commercial value of artworks and building the reputations of emerging artists.

2. Research Background

Art entails artists expressing their feelings and other humanistic elements to their audience. However, for a long time before the twentieth century, art was only centered on regions such as America and Europe[1]. However, with the surging tide of globalization and the profound evolution of geopolitical patterns, contemporary art in Asian countries is gradually emerging and showing great vitality. Firstly, the sales of the art market in Asia continue to rise, especially in China, which has surpassed the UK to become the world's

second-largest art market in 2023, accounting for 19% of total sales[2]. This achievement highlights the enormous potential and vitality of the Chinese art market. At the same time, more and more world-renowned galleries have settled in Hong Kong, and Hong Kong has also welcomed the hosting of well-known exhibitions such as Basel[3], injecting new artistic vitality into this land. According to statistics, in the first decade of the 21st century, art fairs and galleries in the United States and Europe declined by a whopping 28%, while those in Asia increased by 11%[Ibid.]. Combining the unique creative environment of the Asian art world, free from any bias or external pressure, we have jointly constructed a prosperous scene in the Chinese art world. This prosperous scene not only brings enormous development opportunities for Chinese artists, but also injects new vitality and creativity into the global art world.

Given that the Chinese art market is becoming increasingly important in the global art world, with more and more resources gathering in China, how to make reasonable use of these resources to help emerging artists in China go further on their career paths will be something that curators need to consider. For emerging artists in their career development stage, their artistic works often struggle to generate income, and in this case, curators with excellent marketing skills are needed to provide them with assistance. As David Balzer wrote in his book *Curationism*, curation is used to sell and market products, and only through curation can the importance and value of items or experiences be conveyed. The same applies to art, as more and more artists realize the importance of commercial concepts, curators become value providers. In addition, he also explores in the book the need for curators to balance aesthetic and commercial value to meet the needs of investors, collectors, and artists. He believes that curatorial activities usually focus more on the

presentation of cultural and aesthetic values, rather than directly focusing on commercial value. But this does not mean that curation activities completely ignore the market value of works, as the art market and collector interests often affect curation choices and display methods[4].The content emphasized in this book also highlights the importance of curators in the career development of emerging artists.

Looking back at China in the 1980s, it was undergoing a dramatic transformation. During this period, historic events such as the Stars Exhibition and the 85 New Wave of Art Movement emerged that influenced the development of the Chinese art community. With the opening of a new chapter in Chinese art, countless artists, commentators and critics emerged. The most famous among them is Li Xianting, a renowned Chinese art critic, art theorist, editor, and famous curator, who has had an important and far-reaching influence on the occurrence and development of China's modern art movement. With the opening of the 1989 China Modern Art Exhibition at the China Art Museum, China's avant-garde art was able to be showcased for the first time. Li Xianting is the main curator of this exhibition. He designed a sign prohibiting U-turns to express his determination and support to break free from the shackles of thought, and also earned him the title of the Godfather of Contemporary Chinese Art. As his status in the art world continues to grow, when he focuses on a particular work, the value of that work tends to increase rapidly[5][6]. The reason for this is that Li Xianting can guarantee and endorse works of art. This is due to the fact that he has curated many exhibitions featuring both emerging and established Chinese contemporary artists. His support and selection of artists for these exhibitions often signals to collectors and the art market that these artists have significant value and potential.

In the rapid development of the Chinese art world, the role of curators has undergone profound changes from the 1980s to the present. The role of the curator in promoting Chinese artists has changed significantly, with current curators building on previous generations. Modern curators work within a thriving gallery system and have access to different art commercialization platforms such as auctions and exhibitions. Curators are also involved in creating compelling narratives and utilize social media outreach to reach collectors and the media. In contrast, the 1980s environment had significant limitations in promoting artists' work. Curators like Li Xianting had to work with limited resources and opportunities compared to those available to existing curators, and their contributions were limited to promoting artists through art criticism or endorsing specific artworks. As the art world advances rapidly, curators and artists also need to develop new commercial capabilities to ensure they are not eliminated by the art world. Therefore, based on this factual background and the thriving Chinese art world, the focus of this study will be on how curators can help emerging artists in China improve their commercialization abilities, in order to help them create income in their career development stages and go further on their career paths.

When curators help emerging Chinese artists improve their commercialization capabilities, commercial galleries and art fairs are important media that they cannot ignore. The art world is a complex ecosystem, and commercial galleries and art fairs are important conduits between artists and the market. While both platforms play an important role in art exhibitions and sales, they cater to different stages of an artist's commercialization process. Art fairs are grand platforms of

events that take place on a regular basis, usually for a short period of time. They bring together artists from different artistic disciplines to participate, as well as curators, collectors, art dealers, art critics, etc. together to create a lively environment. Art fairs are high-energy, transactional events that facilitate immediate sales and provide extensive exposure to a global audience. For artists, participating in art fairs can help them make a name for themselves quickly, and only a small percentage of emerging artists have their work directly entered into prestigious art fairs, which, if selected, will propel the artist's career forward[7]. Commercial galleries are usually brick-and-mortar galleries that have established stable, long-term relationships with artists. They operate year-round and focus on nurturing artists' careers through curated exhibitions that last several weeks. These galleries invest in their artists, sometimes providing financial support, studio space, or materials, and they work to build the artist's brand. A core function of the gallery as an intermediary linking the artist and the audience is to raise awareness for the artist and to focus on a specific clientele that possesses the ability to appreciate the work presented by the artist and the gallery, and to maintain a good relationship between them[8]. This process of maintaining relationships is one of building reputation and cultivating long-term transactions with collectors. For galleries, art fairs connect galleries with curators, collectors and new audiences. Developing galleries can use art fairs to reach collectors and audiences in all regions of the world to develop their business and increase their visibility in the art world.

These two platforms have had a profound impact on commercializing the works of emerging artists at different stages of their careers. Art fairs provide artists with a platform to quickly commercialize their works and offer them the opportunity to sell them to collectors who are ready to purchase them on the spot. However, not all emerging artists are fortunate enough to exhibit their works at art fairs, so they need the help of curators and commercial galleries. Commercial galleries usually adopt a more cautious attitude, focusing on the long-term development of contracted artists. Curators can help commercial galleries find emerging artists who meet their needs and collaborate with them to provide career development support for these emerging artists who meet the requirements. During the collaboration, the curator provides publicity and career path planning for these emerging artists, while the gallery can offer opportunities for them to hold personal exhibitions and help them connect with collectors and art dealers based on the career plans designed by the curator. Under this multi-party joint strategy, curators can recommend talented emerging artists to sign joint development contracts with commercial galleries. Emerging artists can use the platform of commercial galleries for better career development, and can also participate in art fairs through the channels of commercial galleries; And galleries can also leverage the abilities of curators to find and cultivate artists who meet their needs, and later use talented emerging artists to enhance their status in the art world; For curators, this collaborative approach allows commercial galleries and curators to share risks. This strategy is beneficial for each party involved in the collaboration. Overall, if curators want to enhance the commercialization capabilities of emerging Chinese artists, they need to leverage various resources and resources to provide comprehensive assistance to these artists. Only in this way can more emerging Chinese artists step onto the stage of world art.

3. Research Question

The core question of this study is “how can a curator in today's art world help emerging China artists generate commercial value of their works?”.

4. Methodology

I will use literature review, case studies, and interview method in my research.

I will conduct case studies on artists such as John Yuyi, Wu Yanfeng, and Sun Yidian to support my viewpoint. I will also collect necessary key information and perspectives on the research topic by interviewing curators and independent artists. Due to the fact that the interviewed artists and curators are located in different inland regions of China, I have designed a survey questionnaire centered around the research question. The questionnaire covers the attitudes of curators towards the commercialization of emerging artists, including the importance of building an artist brand system, the feasibility of establishing crowdfunding platforms for artists, the role of curators in promoting emerging artists, and the value of cooperation between emerging artists and well-known brands. As my research topic revolves around emerging artists in China, my survey questionnaire is designed in Chinese. The questionnaire survey can help me collect the thoughts and reflections of these artists and curators on this research question. Finally, I will use brand ecology theory, to explain how curators in today's art world help emerging China artists generate commercial value of their works.

5. Research Aims

The aim of the research is to Investigate the role of curators in enhancing the commercial value of China emerging artists, as to explore the extent to which curators can influence an artist's commercial success and realization in the art market.

6. Literature Review

In the booming Chinese art scene, how to help China's emerging artists achieve professional success is something that curators need to think about, and one of the biggest challenges they face is how to generate enough income for emerging artists during their career development stage. In this section, I reviewed the existing studies and literature, that examine how to help emerging artists improve their commercialization. The studies introduced some business models that curators could use to assist emerging artists in the full cycle of their careers.

Regarding how curators can help emerging artists improve their commercialization, Girshovich, Alina (2017) examines the role of the curator, an interdisciplinary profession that requires not only a very broad range of expertise, but also an excellent ability to articulate and create stories. They are also responsible for exhibition planning, collections management and act as intermediaries connecting artists, galleries, museums, collectors and audiences. With people relying more and more on social media as a means of communicating information, it is difficult for curators or artists who are not good at marketing to get their work recognized by audiences. Artists often need the help of a curator to get their artwork to the art market, so curators need to be aware of potential audience segments and need to consider the audience's interest in the subject matter in order to better plan

exhibitions[9]. As the marketplace continues to change, so do the competencies that curators need to master, and proficiency in marketing skills and the ability to determine potential clientele belongs to the competencies of another important role in the art world-art public relations. According to Mckie, David, and Krishnamurthy Sriramesh (2017), the main responsibilities of an art publicist include creating stories that appeal to the media, customizing specialized press releases for exhibitions or artworks, ensuring the stability and effectiveness of communication channels, developing a marketing strategy, determining the target demographic for exhibitions, and developing unique marketing campaigns[10]. So curators need to integrate the role of art PR and combine the abilities of curators and art PR to better help artists develop their career paths. In addition, as social media continues to evolve, more and more collectors are paying attention to the artist's brand, Lee, Jin Woo, and Soo Hee Lee.(2017) writes that many organizations and curators are beginning to create their own personal IPs, and that a successful personal IP can bring a high premium to a piece of art because more and more people are paying attention to topics such as "who markets it and who owns it"[11].

As curators integrate the role of art public relations, they can plan unique promotional activities for emerging artists. Firstly, it can help emerging artists collaborate with well-known brands. With regard to artists co-branding with established brands to increase commercial value and liquidity, emerging artists usually face difficulties as they are not able to co-brand with brands. It may be due to the fact that emerging artists do not have the ability to do so, and it is also difficult for brands to recognize artists who are still in the developmental stage of their careers. Zhou, Zeyang (2020) suggests that curators usually have experience expressing artists' works to the audience, so identifying the intersection between artists and brands is usually not a difficult task. With the increasingly fierce market competition, co branding has become one of the key innovations in the business field[12]. Brands can improve profitability, customer loyalty, and brand image through this, and artists can reach more audience groups through this. Sanusi, Ade (2023) wrote that in an increasingly competitive market, brands often struggle to stand out. Emerging artists with their fresh and innovative perspectives can help brands create unforgettable brand launches. When brands collaborate with artists, they inject unique features into their products or services to make them stand out in the competition[13]. For emerging artists, co-branding with world-renowned brands can help them expand their audience and help them strengthen the loyalty of their existing audience. The process of co-branding will also increase the credibility and visibility of emerging artists in the art market, all of which will contribute to the career development of emerging artists.

In addition, launching merchandise is another way for curators to improve the financial situation of emerging artists. The Arts To Hearts Project (2022) wrote that in addition to traditional art sales, artists also understand the importance of engaging in other art related revenue generating activities, such as launching and selling merchandise[14]. These products not only help artists accumulate wealth, but also increase their visibility, maintain fan loyalty, and attract new audiences or art enthusiasts. Although launching merchandise is one of the important commercial tools for emerging artists, in most cases, they don't know where to start because they are newcomers to the industry, which requires a lot of time and

in-depth research to familiarize themselves with the complexity of the industry. Therefore, with this business strategy, curators can help emerging artists identify and launch merchandise related to their works. This is because curators have a deep understanding of the art market and can accurately tell or predict what the market may need, filling the gap for emerging artist brands. It is worth noting that Rodner, Victoria (2014) proposed that curators and artists must maintain the integrity and originality of the artwork, and ensure that the artist's artwork is consistent with the released product, in order to obtain long-term brand value[15].

In addition to using these existing business strategies, curators can cultivate a sustainable artistic philosophy among emerging artists to help them achieve long-term business success. Khan (2023) mentioned that with the advancement of time and the popularity of social media, more and more contemporary people do not want to take time to learn but rather want to get things done quickly. This lack of patience spreads not only in Asia but also all over the world, and of course, to artists as well[16]. According to Fan, Xinyuan, and Yuqi Liang (2023), the lack of patience manifests itself in the use of AI to create artwork or replicate the design style of classic artwork, or even directly copying the work of other artists[17]. The artists who are unable to patiently create works of art use shortcut methods to accomplish things that really take a long time of effort to accomplish. However, in the long run, this behavior is unsustainable. Caust Josephine (2021) argues that because copying another person's artwork and inspiration may allow the copyist to achieve short-term success, he is certainly unlikely to achieve long-term success in the field, and since art is an expression of humanistic elements reflecting the artist's mind and spirit, the creator's originality can be reflected in the artwork[18]. A lack of uniqueness not only fails to bring short-term rewards to these artists, but also causes the audience or connoisseurs to lose interest, which is something neither the artists nor the curators want to happen. Therefore, in this fast-paced era, it is necessary for curators to transmit the concept of sustainable long-term career development for emerging artists to help them achieve professional success.

On the other hand, as curators help emerging Chinese artists design various commercial promotion plans, marketing methods cannot be ignored, among which digital marketing and overall brand management concepts must be taken into account. Odedoran (2020) proposed that consumers create and share over 500 billion posts on social media every year, and the increase in social media usage will create opportunities for business owners to attract more customers, expand influence, and receive real-time consumer feedback. Social media marketing makes it possible for businesses to interact like people interact with each other, with social media being affordable and numerous platforms providing businesses with a wide range of choices[19]. For curators, it is crucial to efficiently utilize these social media platforms to promote emerging artists. After mastering the use of social media marketing, curators also need to manage the brand effects formed by emerging artists on social media. Edsall (2021) proposed the brand theory, which encompasses different dimensions such as brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand strategy, and brand positioning to explain brands[20.]. For curators, it is necessary to help emerging artists manage the brand effect they gradually form on social media. This can not only protect the emerging artists from infringement, but also prevent others from plagiarizing their works.

7. Critical Summary

The literature has given insights to my research topic. Especially Mckie's (2017) insights on art public relations are very useful to explore how the identity of curators needs to be transformed, as his proposed responsibilities in art public relations are also very important for curators in today's era. Lee's (2017) research also inspired me on how to integrate marketing skills into the curatorial process, helping emerging Chinese artists to improve their commercialization abilities. In addition, Zhou's (2020) research on brand collaboration has also provided innovative insights into business models, and Sanusi's (2023) conclusion has deepened my understanding of the effects while artists collaborate with well-known brands. Furthermore, the article published by The Arts To Hearts Project (2022) made me realize the feasibility and significance of launching peripheral products, and also reminded me of whether launching peripheral products can help emerging artists reach more audiences and achieve the goal of increasing exposure.

Moreover, Rodner's (2014) research states that in the process when curators help emerging artists promote their work, it is necessary to ensure that the artworks created by the artists are consistent with the products they publish, in order to obtain long-term brand value. Khan (2023) and Caust (2021) argue from different perspectives that some artists who cannot patiently create art use shortcut methods to accomplish things that truly require long-term effort. In the long run, this behavior is short-term and unsustainable. Moreover, it is necessary for curators to convey the concept of long-term development for emerging artists, avoiding them from seeking short-term benefits through plagiarism or the use of AI capabilities, while ignoring long-term career development plans. This is also in line with Fan's (2023) research that for individual artists, the lack of patience is manifested in using artificial intelligence to create art or replicate the design style of classic art, and even directly copying the works of other artists.

On the other hand, Odediran's (2020) discussion on social media and Edsall's (2021) explanation of brand theory were crucial in helping me to build the Brand Ecology Theory, as their perspectives underlie the significance of marketing. I will develop a methodology with a focus on analyzing the marketing behaviors in real cases.

8. Interview Data

The questionnaire filled out by 20 Chinese curators and artist revealed a comprehensive perspective on the commercial aspects of emerging artists. Most people (80%) have not participated in artist incubation programs. Similarly, 75% (15 interviewees) believe that crowdfunding is a tool that has the potential to promote the career development of artists. In addition, these curators also believe that establishing a strong brand ecosystem is crucial for the commercial and public success of artists. An equal number of curators (15 interviewees) acknowledge this view. They advocate that curators play multiple roles, including mentors, planners, and marketers, to effectively cultivate new talents. It is worth noting that 70% (14 interviewees) acknowledge the importance of curators in helping artists develop and market products, indicating the evolution of the role of curators in the art market. Overwhelmingly 95% (19 interviewees) agree that collaborating with well-known brands can increase the artist's visibility and commercial value, and they believe that

promoting such collaborative relationships is crucial. In terms of maintaining artistic integrity, people unanimously oppose plagiarism and the use of artificial intelligence in creation, emphasizing the importance of artistic originality. Finally, when formulating business strategies for artists, curators provide a range of roles they should play, from business consultants to brand builders, emphasizing deep market understanding and the ability to adapt to constantly changing market dynamics. Overall, this survey emphasizes a clear understanding of the multifaceted challenges faced by emerging artists in the business environment, the importance of marketing strategies, and the key role of curators in guiding artists towards commercial feasibility while maintaining artistic integrity.

9. Discussion

Based on the above questionnaire answers and literature review, it is not difficult to find that emerging artists in China need the help of curators to help them plan their subsequent business development plans in the early stages of their careers. This not only effectively helps these emerging artists utilize the art resources gathered in China to achieve rapid fame, but also helps them balance aesthetic and commercial values under the guidance of curators, allowing them to develop their career paths more systematically. Although the current Chinese art market has developed very rapidly, there are still many artists who are withdrawing from their careers. In the current art world, which is filled with countless commercial operations, curators of this era can also help talented artists solve their commercial problems and improve their income level through various channels, which is the core theme of this research. On this basis, I have summarized a set of Brand Ecology Theory, which includes curators using social media to increase the exposure of emerging artists; helping emerging artists analyze art market trends and consumer behavior; collaborating with commercial galleries to incubate emerging artists; participate in art space exhibitions; collaborating with famous brands to launch co-branded products; designing and selling peripheral merchandise of the artist; and teaching emerging artists the correct concept of sustainable development. Through these seven strategies, curators can help emerging Chinese artists with weaker commercialization abilities improve their commercialization abilities.

Firstly, I would like to discuss the benefits of using social media to spread emerging artists. The experience of Taiwanese artist John Yuyi is a typical example of how social media can become a catalyst for artists to gain international recognition. She sold temporary tattoos on the Internet as early as 2013. These tattoos include illustrations designed by her and photos of her swimsuit. She will print this tattoo on herself or the model, and then post it on Instagram. With her temporary tattoos receiving widespread praise, her fans on Instagram are also increasing. In 2017, she was discovered by Gucci and invited to design advertisements for the millennial generation. This collaboration was a great success and became one of the most popular posts on the brand Instagram. Afterwards, The Art Vacancy in New York invited John Yuyi to hold her first solo exhibition[21]. John Yuyi's example demonstrates the importance of social media for emerging artists, and through her digital influence on social media, John Yuyi has gained influential partnerships for her. The core of John Yuyi's success is still related to the viral dissemination attribute inherent in social media and the strong resonance she evokes with the content she posts on social media. Her art

posts on Instagram often revolve around the interaction between the human body and social media. She has attracted much attention because of the "temporary tattoo" series, in which she uses social media icons and other Internet related images as temporary tattoos on human skin. In addition, her works often feature visually striking images, which are easily shared. When people share her works, they also discuss the themes she explores, bringing her more attention. On Instagram, John Yuyi can also interact directly with the audience, which helps maintain loyalty between her and her followers and stimulate their interest. As her works become increasingly popular online, they have attracted the attention of online art and cultural publications, further expanding her influence. Odediran emphasizes the advantages of using social media in marketing, including reaching a large audience, building brand awareness and loyalty, expanding influence, and receiving real-time consumer feedback. To effectively utilize social media marketing to provide promotional opportunities for businesses or content creators, it is necessary to consider how to create high-quality, engaging content, engage with followers in a timely manner, and manage social media tools[22]. Social media has provided John Yuyi with a platform to show her works, interact with audiences and participate in a broader cultural dialogue about the Internet and its impact on society. Her use of these platforms has brought her closer to the audience, and she has also accumulated her audience and fame through these platforms, demonstrating how indispensable social media is in shaping the careers of contemporary artists. If curators can establish corresponding social media accounts in the early career development of emerging artists and regularly share their works and stories behind their creations, they can greatly shorten the time to establish social media and fan groups, provide sufficient exposure and topic heat for emerging artists in the early stages of their career.

The second case is still about social media. In the current art world, a disturbing trend has emerged, with some artists resorting to plagiarism, imitation, and even utilizing artificial intelligence to accelerate the creative process. Although artificial intelligence can become a tool for innovation, its abuse may undermine the essence of creativity. Wu Yanfeng is a great example. Wu Yanfeng is a student at Central Academy of Fine Arts. He is known for his prints of Chinese dragons and constellations, and has built up a huge following. But in 2024, his fans publicly questioned the authenticity of his paintings when they realized that the orientation of the dragon's body in his "Pink Dragon" prints did not match the finished product, and that the outlines of the dragon's body were identical to those of the Shanxi embossed coiled dragons, details that revealed the use of AI. This incident brought about a crisis of confidence for Wu Yanfeng, and many fans questioned that Wu Yanfeng's prints were made by AI, and that many elements of Guo Zikai's works were plagiarized. Although fans and netizens continued to question Wu Yanfeng, it didn't stop them from selling the questionable works on social media, which brought him around 600,000 RMB in revenue. Although this may seem to bring considerable benefits to emerging artists in the short term, it will disrupt their career development. The loss of trust among collectors and art enthusiasts may lead to the devaluation of the artist's works and reputation, thus masking the immediate economic benefits. Consumers and the broader art community believe that authenticity and originality are crucial; Any signs of fraud not only tarnish the reputation of current art, but also

cast doubt on past and future creations. To avoid these pitfalls, curators must cultivate the commercial acumen of emerging artists and adopt strategies to enable them to thrive without compromising their artistic value. They must serve as mentors to guide artists towards sustainable practices that align with the principles of the art market and the expectations of the discerning public.

In addition to emerging artists being able to spread their works through social media platforms, curators can also collaborate with commercial galleries to incubate these talented emerging artists. With this in mind, I have found that curators can leverage their fame and extensive network in the art world to help emerging artists achieve success in their careers in the form of incubators. The concept of incubator originated in the commercial field. The original intention of an incubator is to provide various conveniences or services for startups, helping them grow quickly, create profits or turn losses into profits. The organizations that establish incubators are usually the governments of developed countries or leading enterprises in different industries, who help startups develop rapidly through their deep insights into business trends. This model is also feasible for the relationship between curators and emerging artists[23]. Curators are often seen as gatekeepers to the art world, with a keen insight into talent. They can discover promising artists in the early stages of their careers. When they discover a promising emerging artist, they can sign a contract with the artist to create an incubation program as a catalyst for emerging artists. This partnership will provide comprehensive support to emerging artists, including not only artistic direction, but also all aspects of business management, strategic planning, development planning, theme selection, audience identification, and guiding them to continually improve their artistry for long term profitability, thus avoiding the need for imitation and plagiarism to make a quick buck, and retaining a greater number of talented artists in the art world. Moreover, when incubating emerging artists, curators can also collaborate with commercial galleries to cultivate these emerging artists and accumulate more potential talents for the gallery. Commercial galleries play a crucial role in the art ecosystem by providing a platform for artists to exhibit and sell their works. Galleries can collaborate with curators to provide a platform for emerging artists to exhibit and sell their works. These emerging artists will also help the gallery enhance its brand and commercial capabilities, and diversify the artworks exhibited by the gallery, attracting a wider audience. Simply put, this collaborative model benefits all stakeholders, and the collaboration between curators and commercial galleries to cultivate emerging artists creates a powerful framework for discovering and cultivating new talents. This collaborative relationship leverages the strengths of both parties to provide comprehensive support for artists, ensuring their success in creation and business.

Not all talented emerging artists can showcase their works at world-renowned or large-scale art exhibitions. Those who can participate in small art exhibitions or hold personal exhibitions, can effectively enhance their reputation[24]. With the development of the times, more and more brands are not satisfied with simple retail store design, and they are beginning to transform retail stores into art spaces filled with artistic installations. Based on this, curators can connect with brands that are building new retail stores and place the works of emerging artists that align with the theme of the art space in the art space, thus forming a small-scale art exhibition. This

approach is beneficial to artists because it gives them a unique opportunity to showcase their work to a wider audience that is not part of their typical circle. This allows artists to explore new mediums to express their creativity and will also attract a different type of audience to appreciate and purchase the artwork. Collaborations also help to expose brands and provide young designers with new ideas to meet the needs of different clients. The most famous case is Gentle Monster (GM), which was founded in 2011 and, like many fashion brands, has gained a lot of attention and popularity through Korean dramas and celebrity street photography, as well as crossover collaborations with many trendy brands and personalities. However, what really sets GM apart from other brands is its artistic approach to retailing, arranging unique themes and very eye-catching art installations in the display and decoration of its retail stores, setting up eyewear stores as art exhibitions. GM's retail stores in different regions of the brand have unique artistic concepts full of avant-garde design, and whenever GM collaborates with an artist, they will also display the art installations with corresponding themes[25]. GM and London artist Matthew Stone collaborated to launch the "My Mars" theme in 2020. In this collaboration, both parties reflected humanity's infinite desire to explore the future through this theme and launched a joint product. Afterwards, GM also designed an immersive art installation exhibition with a "My Mars" theme at the SKP mall in Beijing. This exhibition sparked a buzz as soon as it was launched, attracting a lot of young people to visit[26]. This collaboration has brought a huge potential customer base to GM and has also brought a lot of attention to Matthew Stone. For curators and emerging artists, through this small exhibition format, emerging artists can gain new perspectives on their careers and reach a wider audience through such exhibitions, as their collaboration with fashion brands typically takes place in shopping centers with high foot traffic. This cooperation approach has also brought more exposure and injected artistic elements into the brand that is undergoing transformation, which is beneficial for both parties. In addition, during the collaboration process, if the brand discovers the enormous potential of the artist, they can even provide financial support by sponsoring some or all of the artist's exhibitions. For emerging artists, funding is an important component of their growth, as it allows them to focus on their art without worrying about financial constraints. Overall, this small-scale art space exhibition is very beneficial for the career development of emerging artists. It can not only bring them more attention, but also help them solve their financial difficulties.

As the career development of emerging artists progresses, their curators, need to consider how to involve their works in art exhibitions, in order to expand the commercialization path of these emerging artists. Firstly, curators need to study global and regional art market trends, past and upcoming art exhibitions, to grasp the exhibited works and emerging themes, and combine their own experiences to form a macro prediction of the current market. Based on their assessment of the current art market, curators can easily choose art exhibitions that align with the artist's style, audience, and reputation. After completing the preliminary preparation work, the curator needs to work with the collaborating gallery to design marketing and promotion plans for the selected emerging artist, including producing promotional materials, designing stories that match the artist's artistic philosophy, and contacting familiar media and art critics to

comprehensively promote the artist. Through the preparation of curators, it is possible to ensure that emerging artists have the opportunity to showcase their works at renowned art exhibitions, thereby attracting more attention from audiences, art dealers, and collectors, thereby enhancing the commercial value of emerging artists in the art market.

As artists become increasingly well-known, curators can carry out more commercial activities for them, such as co-branding products with globally renowned brands and releasing merchandise related to art products, such as bags printed with artwork images and artwork models. Co-branding with globally recognized brands can significantly enhance the commercial prospects of emerging artists. Although artists' popularity is increasing, it is still difficult to establish partnerships between them and these globally recognized brands, which requires curators to make connections. Curators can leverage their vast network of contacts to select brands with similar themes or values to the artists and connect them. This synergy can quickly elevate the reputation of emerging artists and accelerate their commercialization. A case in point is the collaboration between Louis Vuitton and Sun Yidian, an emerging Chinese artist from the 1990s, to co-launch its Early Fall 2024 womenswear collection. For this collaboration, Louis Vuitton set up a fashion show at the Long Museum in Shanghai. During the show Louis Vuitton presented a new line of clothing and handbags featuring cartoon inflatable animals designed by Sun Yidian, which Louis Vuitton incorporated into this season's collection, such as pink rabbits, yellow ducks, spotted dogs, leopards, zebras, penguins, and more. It's both a fashion show and a solo art exhibition by Sun Yidian. A graduate of the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA), Sun Yidian has become a rising star in the art market in just five years. In the art market, Sun Yidian's works often sell for twice the estimated price. Most famously, her Penguin With Eyelashes from 2018, which fetched a staggering RMB 1.7 million in 2023[27], placing her in the second place of 2023 sales for China's post-1990s artists. The various achievements come from the fact that her designs interrogate current consumerism, and from the fact that her works have also been exhibited in renowned galleries and institutions such as BANK Gallery, MINE PROJECT in Hong Kong, and UCCA. All of these factors have contributed to Sun Yidian's reputation in the art world, and have brought her this opportunity to co-brand with Louis Vuitton. This collaboration not only amplifies Sun Yidian's market valuation, but also serves as a strategic promotional platform, further enhancing her visibility. The success of this collaboration between emerging artists and established brands is evident, providing a practical blueprint for utilizing joint branding as an effective business tool. In this business event, Sun Yidian took advantage of the opportunity to collaborate with Louis Vuitton to build her brand, increasing her visibility and commercial appeal. This also proves that the combination of joint branding with strategic alliances and cultural resonance has become a powerful mechanism for the commercialization of emerging artist works, helping them succeed in the fiercely competitive art market. Through the collaboration between Sun Yidian and Louis Vuitton, we have witnessed the tangible results of the combination of emerging artists and well-known brands. Taking this as a lesson, when curators promote collaboration between emerging artists and well-known brands, they need to act as connectors, strategists, and brand builders to ensure artistic integrity and commercial

success.

Finally, curators help artists distribute merchandise around their art products, which helps maintain a connection between the audience and the artist. Making and selling peripheral goods helps artists spread their artistic works and also increases their income capacity. Surrounding products are usually sold in stores in front of museums or galleries, where all art enthusiasts entering museums can see them. This communication channel can help artists quickly attract new audiences. The curators of this commercial activity need to rely on their professional knowledge in the market and their judgment of consumer preferences to choose the peripheral products to be launched. The most basic peripheral products include clothes, models, badges, etc. These basic peripheral products are usually sold at a low price, but they have strong communication power and are a free form of advertising. In 2006, Hong Kong artist Kenny Wong created Molly after participating in a drawing activity for children, and subsequently launched blind box products with Molly as the theme. In 2016, Pop Mart signed an exclusive licensing agreement with Kenny Wong to promote Molly products in mainland China. This behavior not only helped Kenny Wong's Molly open up a new sales path, but also helped Pop Mart reverse its decline and successfully list on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange in 2020. According to Pop Mart's prospectus, the trendy toy products independently developed based on Molly's image brought in 456 million yuan in revenue for the company in 2019. This data not only demonstrates the enormous wealth that Kenny Wong has gained from years of collaboration, but also earned him the gold award for Best Hong Kong Authorized Brand in 2020. The success of Kenny Wong is irreplaceable, but it provides a fresh perspective on how to enhance the commercial capabilities of emerging artists. The reason why Kenny Wong can succeed is that Molly is loved by consumers. Taking this as a lesson, if curators can help emerging artists combine their artworks to launch products that consumers are interested in, then this will greatly increase the artist's income.

Based on the above examples, I have summarized a set of methods that can effectively help curators increase the commercialization of emerging artists, which I call Brand Ecology Theory. This theory is inspired by the branding theory proposed by Edsall. Edsall who offers is a systematic combination of all the branding concepts with the company's growth objectives. This theory explains that the goal of a brand is to grow its business, and the way to achieve this is to connect with buyers, stand out in the marketplace and consistently deliver more value than other brands[28]. Based on these real-life examples and Carter's perspective, I completed the theory. In this theory, I suggest that curators use the seven strategies proposed in the Brand Ecology Theory to personalize and promote emerging artists at an early stage of their careers; these seven strategies are curators using social media to increase the exposure of emerging artists; helping emerging artists analyze art market trends and consumer behavior; collaborating with commercial galleries to incubate emerging artists; participate in art space exhibitions; collaborating with famous brands to launch co-branded products; designing and selling peripheral merchandise of the artist; and teaching emerging artists the correct concept of sustainable development. Once the system is complete, the artist only needs to maintain the quality and consistency of his or her work, and then it will be easy to achieve success. As Howard Becker once proposed art worlds,

the art world consists of the social networks that enable the production, dissemination, and consumption of artworks, and which include a variety of roles in displaying, preserving, promoting, purchasing, and producing. Art is produced through interactions between artists, art dealers, curators, critics, and other cultural gatekeepers who work together to construct the meaning of artworks and determine their value[29.]. When a curator brands an artist, that artist can be more easily integrated into the art world, and through branding can reach the various players that make up the art world network, thus accelerating the exposure of the artist and the value of their work.

Specifically, the curator builds a brand ecosystem for the artist, the core goal of this system is to build up the artist's personal IP around the artist's whole career, when the artist's personal IP is well known by the audience, it will rapidly increase the artist's popularity. When people mention the symbol that symbolizes the artist, they will think of the artist's creative concept and artwork, which can maintain the audience and collector's attention to the artist, and can effectively develop potential audience and collectors[30]. Building an artist's brand ecosystem is divided into several steps. Initially, curators need to position the artist's audience according to the artist's creative concept, and after the positioning is completed, the artist needs to maintain the consistency of the creative concept. In the initial stage it is necessary to utilize social media for promotion, posting the artist's stories behind their creations and completed artwork on different social media platforms, and also collaborating with other art critics and curators on the platforms, so that they can also post content related to that artist, which is a very powerful enabler for building a personal brand[*ibid*]. The aim of this stage is to make the artist's work available to a wider group of target audiences, thus developing them into loyal viewers. In the middle stage, the curator needs to work with the gallery to build up the artist's reputation in his or her field of specialization. Curators need to use their contacts to introduce emerging artists to commercial galleries and start joint incubation programs with them, in order to build up the reputation of the artist in his/her field of expertise and to prepare the artist's work for participation in art fairs. By judging the future trends of the art market and art fairs, curators can select artworks in advance that meet the aesthetics of the current art market and art fairs. For emerging artists who do not meet the requirements, curators can showcase their works in art spaces established by trendy brands, accumulating more fame and creative ideas for these non compliant emerging artists. At a later stage, when the cooperating emerging artists participate in well-known art fairs, the curator can find world-famous brands for them to cooperate and jointly launch co-branded products, thus increasing their commercial value in the art market. In addition, at a later stage, the curator also needs to launch the artist's peripheral merchandise at the same time, such as models, clothes or handbags printed with the artist's works, and so on. These peripheral goods are placed in the merchandising areas of museums and galleries or social media and the internet are used to sell these goods. When this strategy is successfully implemented, the curator builds a brand ecosystem for the talented emerging artist, and rapidly increases the commercialization of the emerging artist's work.

It is worth noting that in the process of building the artist's brand ecosystem, curators also need to pay attention to the changing trends of the art market and changes in the consumer

behavior of collectors, so as to help the artist make adjustments to adapt to changes in the market at the early stage of creation. As the artist's career progresses into the middle and late stages, when they stand in the venue of a famous art fair, the curator can also write a press release with highlights based on this set of stories, which can attract media attention and coverage, and can also reach more industry insiders. All of these strategies to enhance the commercialization ability of emerging artists are aimed at preventing them from taking shortcuts to plagiarize or imitate the works of other artists due to financial issues. These strategies not only enhance their commercialization ability and bring them more income, but also serve as a strategy to maintain their creative patience. Because in today's society, few people have patience, and more and more people focus on how to make money quickly, while ignoring the hidden dangers brought by making money quickly.

10. Conclusion

This study deeply analyzes and discusses the important role of curators in promoting the careers of emerging artists, enhancing their commercial value, and realizing their value. I have summarized a set of methods that can effectively help curators improve the commercialization of emerging artists, which I call Brand Ecology Theory. This theory can enable curators to efficiently enhance the commercialization capabilities of emerging Chinese artists, and it can cover all career stages of artists. It is worth noting that this theory is based on existing successful cases and commercial marketing theories, and is only applicable to the Chinese art market. For curators, if they want to provide assistance to artists through this theory, they first need to master the skills of art public relations, have a deep understanding of the art market, and possess certain marketing knowledge. It is hoped that the theory can we help emerging artists in China better develop their careers and create a unique and sustainable brand ecosystem for these artists.

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