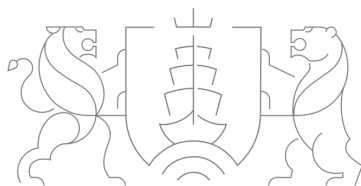


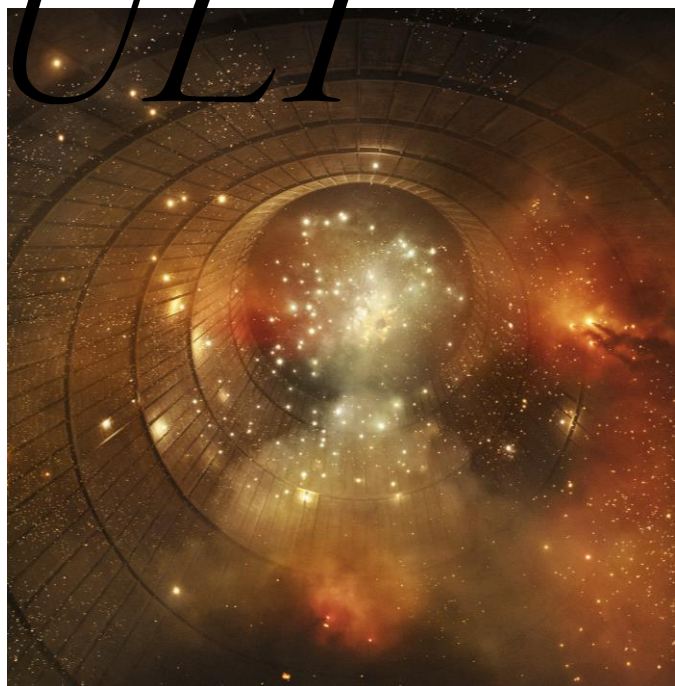
ART CONSULT

NEWSLETTER

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Julian Charrière
Controlled Burn (detail)
Cooling Tower A.7, 2023
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THE ECONOMY OF AESTHETICS: MUSEUMS, BRANDS, AND THE NEW GRAMMAR OF DESIRE

Imagine an exhibition that looks exactly like a luxury brand flagship store. The walls immaculate white, the lighting precise like a Dior spot, the silence expensive. Only this time, no handbags are on display, but artworks that present themselves in the same aesthetic breath as premium products. Now imagine a fashion brand that co-finances a museum, not through art acquisitions, but as a runway with fresh carpets, new seats, and a lounge where visitors seem to have been cast for a minimalist fashion house. If no masterpieces are being acquired, at least the fashion, the ambiance, the aura.

In this scenario, both the museum and the brand would not simply encounter each other but would become mutually necessary. For brands need cultural capital more than ever. A EUR 2'000 hoodie doesn't sell because it's warm or looks good, but because it is culturally charged, through art, through symbolic authorization. Pierre Bourdieu would have put it this way: The conversion of symbolic into economic capital no longer happens through origin, craftsmanship, or history, but through cultural legitimization. And in a present shaped by trends, screens, and fleeting attention, museums remain those last places that can say: "This matters."

On the other hand, museums need what they lack most: economic capital. Acquisition budgets are shrinking, public funding is stagnating, and collections remain static. As a result, the cultural temple gradually transforms into a gatekeeper and eventually into a club. A space of belonging, with previews, member circles, and an atmosphere that is more about social choreography than quiet contemplation. The museum becomes the place of art, the "place to be," and at the same time, a place of distinction.



Parallel to this, a new type of space is emerging: let's call it White Cube 2.0. The classic White Cube, which Brian O'Doherty once described as an ideological space of neutralization, is no longer a neutral shell today. The supposed emptiness that once gave art a sacred aura has now become the aesthetic currency of luxury consumption. Galleries are being set up like flagship stores; flagship stores present products as originals or create editions. Curatorship and designership are merging; space becomes a semantic cipher. It is a development that Andrea Fraser anticipated early on: The institution, according to her thesis, is not the framework for art – *it is part of its content*.

Today, we are witnessing the final convergence: space, brand, art – interchangeable in style, but not in effect. A space that looks like luxury generates desire. A space that sounds like a museum generates meaning. In between: a new alphabet of desire.

Thus, a cycle is created: luxury consumes art to build symbolic capital, and later feeds the economic capital generated from this back into the cultural sector. Not a metaphysical act, but a precise art-capital loop.

In this context, the current Gerhard Richter retrospective at the Fondation Louis Vuitton takes on added sharpness: the once East German poster artist, now the most expensive living artist, oscillating between figuration and abstraction throughout his life – now staged in the architectural flagship of a global luxury brand. Here, showroom, brand, and museum intersect so closely that it's barely clear who is elevating whom. And yet, it is precisely here that the power of art reveals itself: It resists any role that might be imposed upon it and asserts its own.

What we are observing is not a decay, but a system change. Showrooms are becoming museums, museums are "showroomizing," and brands are curating. Art itself, however, remains the stable core that makes all these movements readable. For art possesses that rare quality which both eludes and transforms the economy: it transforms perception into knowledge, surface into meaning, gestures into thoughts. It accompanies biographies, not seasons. It creates resonant spaces that cannot be accelerated. And it is precisely in this that its irresistible power lies: Art is and remains one of the highest forms of aesthetic, cultural, and emotional capital.

Anyone who engages with it invests not only in a work, but in a way of life. In intensity. In insight. In a kind of happiness that does not fade but grows. Acquiring art, consciously, wisely, from the experience of resonance, is perhaps the most intelligent and fulfilling way to transform capital into culture and culture into a form of wealth that is more than ownership: a wealth of seeing, feeling, and understanding.

Marie-Kathrin Krimphoff

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