

2. Art and Social Media

At the 2025 edition of the Transmediale festival in Berlin, choreographer Nina Davies and 2girls1 Campo, in collaboration with *The Inexorable Non-Player Character* (2025), staged a performance that began with a series of oddly mechanical gestures, accompanied by a screen showing TikTok contributions as a backdrop. The dancers moved through space as if caught in a loop, their limbs repeating with a glitchy rhythm, oscillating between fluid motion and abrupt stasis. The sequence was instantly recognizable to anyone familiar with TikTok's #NPC trend: a viral format in which creators parodied the jerky, repetitive behaviors of Non-Player Characters in video games. On the platform, these imitations circulated as short clips and collages, layered with AI-generated fragments and ironic captions. On stage, Davies wove them into a dance choreography, juxtaposed with projected TikTok videos in which the same gestures multiplied through endless remixing.

What emerged was not a simple transfer from screen to stage, but a recursive exchange in which the TikTok trend itself operated as a form of co-authored artistic practice, according to Davies, staged in a form of resistance toward automative futures (*The Inexorable Non-Player Character* 2025). Following this logic, the chapter begins by arguing that social media are not merely transmission mechanisms, but environments in which artistic form is shaped, where the logic of trend, remix, and virality becomes a material of practice. We will explore how art is conceived within platforms, how it is disseminated through them, and how both forms influence perception and value. While art history and theory are not the author's main areas of expertise, this chapter is necessary to lay the groundwork for what follows. It sets the stage for the subsequent chapters, which examine how social media reconfigure space (Hybrid Space) and how artistic practices mediated online reconfigure art spaces (Hybrid Art Space).

2.1 Types of Relationship between Art and Social Media

The relationship between art and social media can be situated along a continuum that extends from works conceived within social media to works merely disseminated through it. This distinction is crucial; yet, in practice, most works occupy a position between these poles. Across this spectrum, mechanisms of remix, participation, and circulation emerge that blur the boundaries between production and promotion, as well as between author and audience.

Social media art. In 2010, Xiao argued that social media art can be understood as art in which the web is not only a tool for marketing or distribution but an essential part of the artistic expression itself. According to this view, the work must be adapted to the device or platform, respond specifically to the online space, and involve the audience in some way. The most compelling forms, Xiao suggested, even inspire the crowd to participate in co-creating the work. (Xiao 2010b; 2010c; 2010a). This definition underscores that the specificity of the medium is not accidental but constitutive of the work itself.

In 2016, a year when social media reached new levels of cultural and political influence, with Instagram introducing Stories and live streaming gaining momentum, Alessandro Mininno and Stefano Mirti reiterated this emerging understanding of artistic practice. They argued that works of art should be conceived to exist directly on social media platforms and should be participatory in nature, allowing the audience to be directly involved in the artistic process. (Mininno and Mirti 2016).

An early example of social media art is Man Bartlett's *Tips for Instagrammers Who Want More Likes* (2014), as seen in Fig. 1, in which the artist created an Instagram post featuring a painted canvas listing strategies for online visibility. The recursive gesture highlighted how the symbolic economy of likes had already become integral to the artistic field.



Figure 1. Man Bartlett, “Tips for Instagrammers Who Want More Likes”, Instagram post, 2014. Screenshot of the work as presented on the artist’s website, reproduced here in black and white. Source: Man Bartlett, <http://www.manbartlett.com> (accessed 2017).

TikTok-native practices. With the rise of TikTok, these dynamics have intensified. Artists and creators utilize the platform’s mechanisms, like trends, sounds, and challenges, so that the “work” emerges less as a single-authored piece than as the activation of a participatory chain of re-enactments and remixes.

An example is the *digital exquisite corpse*, where under hashtags such as #ExquisiteCorpse, artists and users contribute sequential fragments to a drawing, collage, or performance, each remixing the previous contribution. In contrast to traditional notions of authorship, these chains foreground a distributed creativity in which the artwork exists only through a cumulative process. During the 2020s intense wave of NFTs, artistic processes also adopted a participatory character, supported by communities on social media platforms like Discord.



Figure 2. “Exquisite Corpse” challenge, Instagram post by @MisterJamesGallagher, 2025. Screenshot from Instagram, reproduced here in black and white (accessed 2025).

Another recurring strategy is the hashtag #DuetThis, where artists upload incomplete works—a sketch, a lettering fragment, a digital painting—and explicitly invite followers to “finish” or reinterpret them. The resulting series of duets creates a polyphonic artwork that undermines the distinction between creator and audience. Similarly, visual reenactment challenges invite the community to redo or reinterpret a concept—such as redrawing a meme, painting a familiar object from multiple perspectives, or collectively iterating an aesthetic motif. Here, the value of the work is generated not by the individual post but by the constellation of responses it triggers across the platform. Other hashtags, such as #NPC (Non-Player Character), circulate widely in the form of political memes that contest political agendas through digital content, often generated by AI.

Since 2021, the proliferation of AI-generated art has further complicated the notion of “native” social media art. Various architectures of generative AI, circulate on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok both as artistic artifacts and as critical interrogations of algorithmic production.

Art is disseminated through social media. A second category concerns works that are diffused through social media but not explicitly conceived for them. In this case, platforms primarily serve as channels for promotion and communication. However, this dissemination is not neutral: it subjects artworks to the logics of metrics, visibility, and engagement that increasingly govern the cultural field, often still leveraging a participatory response. A well-known example is Ai Weiwei, who consistently uses Instagram not only to document his installations and studio practice but also to circulate political messages, behind-the-scenes images, and audience reactions (Weiwei 2025). While his works are not created for the platform, their remediation online amplifies their impact, inviting publics to engage, share, and debate—thus extending their reach into algorithmically governed spaces of reception.

These two categories should not be understood as mutually exclusive but as the extremes of a continuum. Many artistic practices oscillate between them: an artist may rely on social media to promote works conceived for a gallery while simultaneously experimenting, using formats native to the feed. Likewise, museums may stage physical exhibitions accompanied by digital commissions, which are explicitly designed for online dissemination. Recognizing this continuum is essential, as it allows us to move beyond reductive dichotomies between the “digital” and the “physical,” and to understand platforms as creative environments in their own right.

2.2 Collective Authorship

If social media has transformed the circulation of art, it has also profoundly reshaped the modalities of collective authorship. Rather than positioning the artist as a singular creator and the audience as a passive recipient, platforms encourage iterative practices in which participation, remixing, and co-creation become constitutive elements of the work itself.

One strategy is to foreground the dimension of production collectively. In Singapore, for example, the collective soft/WALL/studio used Instagram in 2020, as visible in Fig. 3, to disseminate images that articulated the context of their practice, effectively transforming the platform into a discursive space for collaboration and reflection. By inviting the public into the production of meaning, projects like these anticipated the dialogic and participatory authorship that has since become mainstream on TikTok and Instagram.



Figure 3. soft/WALL/studio, Instagram wall (profile view), 2017. Screenshot from the collective's Instagram account (@softwallstuds), reproduced here in black and white.

The dynamics of production, framing, and reception thus form circular processes: an artist's post becomes material for audience responses, which in turn influence future works, exhibitions, and even the artist's own framing of their practice. What began as isolated instances of co-authorship has evolved into a remix culture, in which the audience not only comments on art but also actively reshapes its form, context, and value.

TikTok has further amplified these dynamics by integrating co-production into its very structure. The *duet* and *stitch* functions enable users to add to an existing video, creating chains of responses that collectively constitute a distributed artwork. In such cases, the artwork exists less as a single-authored product than as a layered assemblage, whose meaning and value emerge through accumulation and variation.

The use of AR filters similarly exemplifies this shift. When artists design filters that can be downloaded and applied by users, each act of adoption multiplies the work and embeds it in new contexts—from selfies to live performances. A telling example is Johanna Jaskowska's viral filter *Beauty3000* (2019–ongoing), which enveloped users' faces in a reflective, liquid-like surface. The filter spread globally on Instagram, not as a static artifact but through countless user performances that re-situated the work in everyday contexts. In this way, the artwork itself was inseparable from the participatory practices that sustained it, foregrounding how digital publics co-produce meaning through acts of appropriation and circulation. These collective practices suggest that art in the age of social media is not only about works and audiences, but also about the processes of co-production and co-authorship that unfold across digital and physical sites.

2.3 Institutions and Platforms Curatorship

If artists have appropriated social media as both a medium and a stage, cultural institutions have undergone a profound transformation as well. Museums, galleries, and archives no longer treat platforms as auxiliary channels of communication but increasingly view them as curatorial environments in their own right.

An early ironic twist on curating within digital platforms was the 2016 exhibition *Unlike*, curated by Thomas Cheneseau. Works originally conceived for social media were re-presented in a gallery setting, translated into physical supports and spatialized displays. Rather than merely documenting online practices, the exhibition highlighted the interplay between digital and physical contexts, constructing a narrative that made explicit how curatorial practices had become entangled with online platforms, and thus with users and algorithmic logics. By bringing what was ordinarily encountered in social media feeds into the physical space of a curated exhibition, *Unlike* exposed the underlying trick of this translation (Cheneseau 2016).

Since then, many museums and galleries have established a permanent presence on social media, treating their accounts as extensions of the institution's curatorial presence. Instagram feeds have become sites where collections are reframed, exhibitions are serialized into micro-narratives, and audiences are invited to engage through likes, comments, and shares.

A notable example is the Museum Barberini in Potsdam (Brandenburg), which has developed a comprehensive digital strategy that integrates social media into its curatorial practices. Beyond maintaining a strong presence on Instagram through reels, educational content, and exhibition highlights, the museum extends its mission via the Barberini App, virtual tours, and an online media library ("Museum Barberini Potsdam" 2025). These tools frame collections and exhibitions not only for on-site visitors but also for distributed publics, making the museum's digital accounts function as parallel curatorial

spaces. Other institutions have embraced platforms even more directly as spaces for experimentation. Since 2020, Tate has utilized TikTok to connect with younger audiences through short-form videos that remix archival material, showcase behind-the-scenes processes, and encourage playful forms of engagement.

The pandemic accelerated this process. With physical spaces closed, institutions turned to platforms as primary venues for mediation. As a result, new professional figures emerged: social media curators, community managers, and content specialists now work alongside traditional staff. Their expertise lies in translating institutional missions into platform-specific grammars: a collection narrated through reels, a research project serialized in TikTok videos, an archival fragment recontextualized as a meme. The institutional voice is no longer confined to catalogs or wall texts; it circulates in fifteen-second clips and ephemeral stories. Recent research has demonstrated that these roles have become pivotal in how institutions manage their visibility and relevance in the digital sphere (Matiash et al. 2025).

This shift points to a broader transformation: curatorship today is not confined to galleries or catalogs, but extends to “collective consumption” and also to the infrastructures of the platforms themselves. Each user can co-curate their own selection on Instagram, TikTok, or Pinterest (Giannini and Bowen 2016). Additionally, the platform co-curates content with AI recommendation systems and engages with its digital audience. Social media accounts, feeds, and hashtags become sites of narrative construction, audience building, and value formation.

2.4 Visitors' Practices between Identity Building and Digital Re-Curation

If cultural institutions have increasingly incorporated digital platforms into their curatorial strategies, audiences have mirrored this shift through their own practices. Today, museum visitors are rarely without smartphones or tablets, which they use to photograph, record, and share their experiences (Budge 2018). This behaviour has become a central feature of the museum visit, to the point that the Victoria and Albert Museum, in England, for instance, moved from displaying signs prohibiting photography to placing social media at the heart of its visitor strategy, encouraging audiences to post with dedicated hashtags. The act of photographing artworks, taking selfies, framing architectural details, or capturing moments of social interaction extends beyond mere documentation.

Such practices integrate museum artifacts, spaces, and experiences into personal identity, simultaneously reconfiguring exhibitions in the realm of social media (Kozinets 2017).

In the case of artworks, photography may follow an aesthetic pursuit, emphasizing harmonious visual properties, or it may engage with the conceptual message of the work. Both forms are incorporated into social media feeds to enhance the self-images of those who post them (Miles 2016). In the case of architectural space, cultural institutions themselves become subjects of capture. However, as John Falk (2006: 151) observes, visitors actively use the social and physical context of the museum to create personal meaning (Falk 2006). Social surroundings, too, become part of this repertoire: photographing friends, groups, or performances enacts identity not only through art and architecture but through socially situated activity. What once might have remained private or limited to a smaller circle now leaves durable, algorithmically amplified traces.

When we talk about museums, they also hold a symbolic dimension, having long been established as places of culture, education, and aesthetic revelation. By photographing and

incorporating museum objects into their social media feeds, visitors can transfer some of the aura or symbolic significance of these artifacts onto themselves (Rounds 2006). At the same time, however, as we previously observed, they also contribute to shaping the institution's identity. Visitors' images function as subjective or collective interpretations of the space and its collection, re-curating exhibitions beyond the institution's walls and into online environments (Villaespesa and Wowkowych 2020). As represented in Figure 4, these practices operate along two interlinked dimensions: the construction of personal identity and the re-curation of the museum online. Visitors incorporate artworks, artifacts, architecture, social interactions, and even practical items into their digital repertoires, each contributing to both individual self-fashioning and institutional representation. What determines whether these objects or moments are captured and circulated often depends on four recurring criteria: their narrative relevance, perceived importance, iconic quality, or visual attractiveness (Miles 2016).

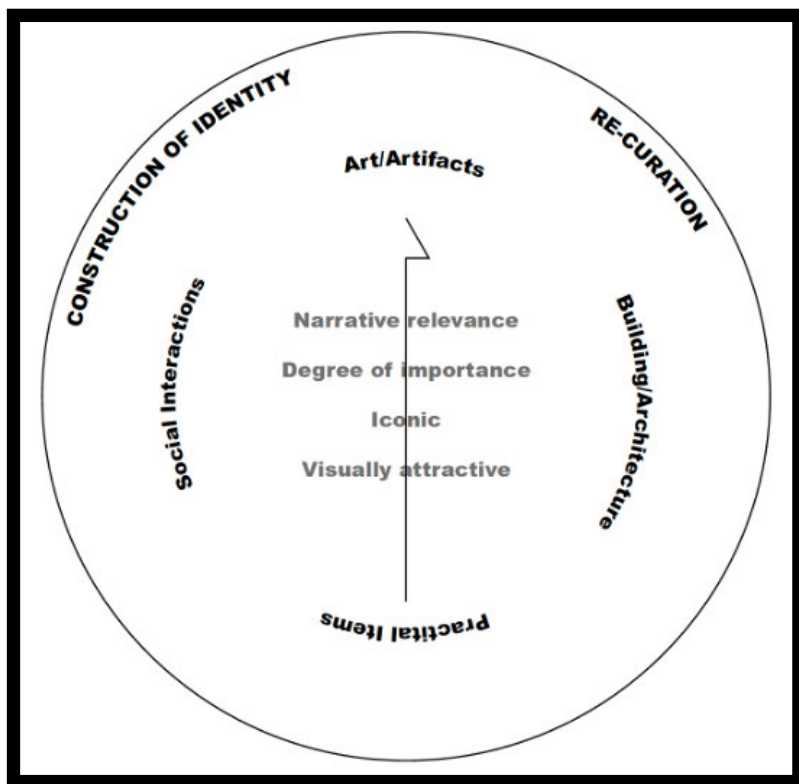


Figure 4. Graphic representation of visitors’ practices of photography while visiting cultural institutions. Diagram by the author. Originally published in Tomarchio (2021, 2023).

Interactivity adds another layer. Installations that invite participation, experiential environments, or technologically immersive works are especially effective at generating content, as they allow the visitor’s body to be directly incorporated into the image (Budge 2018). This intertwining of exhibition design and media production raises new questions for curatorship: how should practices evolve, considering audiences’ compulsion to document and share?

When such criteria intersect with the affordances of social media platforms, they generate feedback loops of *mimicry*: once particular objects, views, or experiences dominate online circulation, subsequent visitors reproduce them, photographing

and reposting similar content. Over time, this repetition produces emergent, self-organizing forms of digital curatorship, where audiences themselves create hierarchies of visibility that shape how museums are perceived both on-site and online. The diagram thus visualizes how personal identity works and institutional re-curation are mutually reinforcing, entangled through cultural hierarchies and algorithmic amplification.

2.5 Markets, Value, and Influencers

In art production and consumption, the value of art can be defined by two dimensions: aesthetics (i.e., art for art's sake) and economically viable cultural production. Gladys Engel Lang (1990) argued that the value of art was traditionally determined by two roles: the gatekeepers and the audience. The gatekeepers (curators, museum directors, gallery directors) establish conventions. At the same time, the audience ultimately determines the value of art by deciding whether to consume it or not (Lang and Lang 1990). Mass consumption of a cultural good is informed by its collective consumption, which is the tendency to consume what other people consume. Over the past two decades, this collective consumption has been reinforced by the digitalization of cultural goods (e.g., movies, music, books, media) and the introduction of recommendation systems to facilitate browsing and consumption. In addition, the digitalization of cultural goods has introduced new actors into the creation of its value chains. In a digitally mediated community, users who interact in the consumption of goods should no longer be considered solely the audience of the work of art but increasingly need to be seen as gatekeepers themselves. In this sense, the mediated community now contributes to the interpretation and the production process of art.

When examining visual art, social media offers visually oriented platforms that are playing an increasingly significant role in the production, consumption, and creation of art value. Instagram galleries and artists' channels on social media now

play a significant role by influencing collectors on what to buy and artists on how to produce, or even by offering a platform for digital art itself.

On visual platforms, collectors not only browse but also express their taste. They discover new artists, signal their acquisitions, and cultivate followings that position them as influencers. In this way, collectors' posts impact both the visibility and the market value of works even before transactions occur. The act of sharing thus functions simultaneously as an aesthetic judgment, an economic investment, and a social positioning.

Galleries and art fairs have adapted accordingly, curating their Instagram presence as a parallel exhibition space where works are displayed, contextualized, and often sold through direct contact initiated via the platform. Surveys confirm that Instagram has become one of the primary channels through which collectors first encounter works, with a significant share of acquisitions traced back to digital discovery (Art Basel and UBS 2018).

The logic of social media has also fostered the rise of influencers as cultural intermediaries. Beyond traditional collectors, lifestyle influencers, critics, and even artists themselves mobilize large followings to amplify trends, elevate aesthetics, and shape perceptions of value.

The recent trajectory of NFTs illustrates both the potential and the precarity of such digitally mediated value systems. In March 2021, *Beeple's Everyday: The First 5000 Days* was sold at Christie's for USD 69 million (Christie's Press Center 2021). Soon after, artists such as Pak and Refik Anadol gained global visibility by using NFTs not only as an artistic medium but also as a distribution infrastructure. Platforms like Nifty Gateway and OpenSea became central to this emerging ecosystem. However, by 2023, the market had contracted sharply: sales of art-related NFTs on platforms outside the traditional art market dropped from a peak of USD 2.9 billion in 2021 to just USD 1.2 billion in 2023, a decline of around 51 percent (Art Basel and

UBS 2024). Institutions and collectors approached the field with increased caution, reflecting broader economic uncertainty and the cooling of speculative demand. While the speculative frenzy subsided, NFTs have left behind infrastructures, communities, and debates about ownership that continue to shape the online artistic economy. The boom-and-bust cycle highlighted the risks of overly tying cultural value to volatile digital markets. The intensified adoption of social media within the art field has not only provided a channel for distribution but also facilitated a new form of engagement. However, it has also transmitted the very logic of social platforms into the art market. The case of NFTs demonstrates this dynamic: their rapid acceleration, viral circulation, and subsequent decline mirror the rhythms of social media itself, where attention peaks sharply before fading just as quickly. What was initially presented as a technological revolution soon revealed itself as subject to the same algorithmic cycles of visibility and obsolescence that shape digital cultures more broadly.

Taken together, these developments demonstrate that value in the contemporary art world is increasingly determined by platform-mediated social processes: not only the judgments of curators and the consumption patterns of audiences, but also the algorithmic amplifications of influencers, collectors, and creators. Value emerges at the intersection of aesthetic criteria, economic exchange, and digital visibility.



Figure 5. #Kusama, Instagram hashtag feed. Screenshot from Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/kusama/>), visited in 2020, reproduced here in black and white.

2.6 Conclusion

The analysis in this chapter has traced how social media reshape art across production, dissemination, participation, institutional practice, markets, and algorithmic mediation. What emerges is not a linear flow from artist to audience but a set of recursive dynamics in which production, framing, perception, and value continuously inform and transform one another. Artistic practice on social media operates through feedback loops: the post becomes raw material for remix, metrics of visibility recalibrate value, institutional communication turns into curatorial space, and algorithmic filters act as invisible co-authors.

The next chapter develops this argument further by shifting the analytical lens from art to space. By reframing social media not merely as communication platforms but as infrastructures of Hybrid Space, we can better grasp how the dynamics of visibility, participation, and algorithmic mediation translate into new forms of spatial organization and cultural production.

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