A PUBLICATION OF BURNING MAN'S PHILOSOPHICAL CENTER

Building a Renaissance in your Back Yard.

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STUART MANGRUM, & FELICITY GRAHAM

FORWARD BY KIM COOK

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Table of Contents

FORWARD

– Kim Cook –

What does it mean to examine the role of money in art — in Burning Man culture — and to do so through a lens focused on the Renaissance? This is the task undertaken by this series of Burning Man Journal posts created by Caveat Magister in concert with Burning Man's Philosophical Center, led by Larry Harvey.

It may be helpful to step back and remember that money is a chosen denominator of value — a currency. As such it is a socially constructed vehicle for transferring something of value from one entity to another. That means thinking about what we value is an essential component of a dialogue about art and money.

Money is openly discussed in this series: how it is generated, who has it, who needs it. It is also explored from all sorts of angles — not always coming from "the rich guy" but potentially coming through community — in the Renaissance, perhaps guilds or churches, in the world of Burning Man perhaps Theme Camps and crowd-funding. We are asked to consider the flows and ways in which money can be accessed to support art and artists.

This series also asks us to consider what we value. If we value art, will we see an increase in quality? Do we concern ourselves with quality or with process? And who digs deep and makes sure that art indeed is available — that art *happens*. In the world of Burning Man, that art is generated through the alchemy of artists and community, which converts inspiration into a realm of kinetics and aesthetics that both responds to and

struggles with the larger environment that is the place: Black Rock City. Much of this art-making relies on the contributed efforts of those who come to build, to make, to cook, to create community together such that the end result can be shared by the citizens who participate in the event each year.

If we were to convert this effort into monetary value, we would find ourselves short, both financially and experientially. David Best, originator of the Temple in Black Rock City, is known to say, "Volunteers are much more expensive than paid labor." He speaks to the need to love, to care, to address each stage of the process and each person with intentionality grounded in the creation of meaning. And perhaps this is where value is created at Burning Man: our ability to create meaning that is invested in people and results in art.

In one condensed timeline of the eight days on playa, we connect, we face our limitations, we celebrate, and we construct what is our unit of measure: experience. Artists, humans, communities construct meaning. They may attach meaning to currencies of a monetary scale or of another value construct. In the end, what you get is highly proportional to what you give, and thus when Caveat exhorts us that you may get the art you deserve, it is a reminder to invest wisely. Value becomes a function of our willingness to invest. Time, money, caring — whether it results in an artwork, a meal, or the construction of a narrative that is a life well lived, requires that we think deeply, give generously, and live openly. In our world the art is both a means and an end.

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ART, MONEY, AND THE RENAISSANCE: RE-IMAGINING THE RELATIONSHIP

– Caveat Magister –

Silicon Valley didn't invent the "gig economy." On the contrary, the life of a contractor with neither benefits nor security would have been very familiar to Leonardo da Vinci.

According to Dr. Matthew Landrus, a member of the history faculty at Oxford and a specialist on the artists and engineers of the 14th–18th centuries, Leonardo was a "working artist" with frequent commissions, yes, but he made most of his money from civil and military engineering. And if he was constantly in demand, it was because "he worked hard to make sure he was in demand."

In fact, of the voluminous journals that Leonardo left us, including his thoughts on art, engineering, science, nature, history, and even (up to a point) social customs — there is virtually nothing indicating his political views.

"That was too dangerous," Landrus said. "He didn't want to risk offending a patron." Leonardo was a celebrity, he was a legend in his own time, but he didn't have a safety net. There was no plan B.

The "gig economy" (or "service economy" if you want a less accurate euphemism) is not an innovation but a recurrence of an earlier model and an earlier time. Artists have usually lived on the economic fringes of society, but for most of Western history everyone was, in some way, dependent upon the largesse of a patron.

It was the rise of the middle class — the very bourgeoisie whom 20th century artists delighted in mocking and shocking —

that made the idea of an independent citizenry possible. The "nation of shopkeepers" were what made an independent avant garde a force.

But if economic forces were vital for art's liberation from patronage, it still didn't happen by accident. The man who is most often credited for freeing artists from the patronage system lived almost 300 years after Leonardo, and it's a story every artist should know.

Dr. Samuel Johnson wrote the first full dictionary of the English language, and when he began the project, it was under the patronage of the 4th Earl of Chesterfield. But after providing an initial grant, Chesterfield stopped supporting it for the entirety of the seven years it took Johnson to finish. After it was done, however, Chesterfield began mentioning the Dictionary publicly, along with his own "involvement" in the project.

Johnson, notoriously easy to offend, responded with a public letter in which he trashed Chesterfield — and the idea of patrons as a whole.

"Is not a patron, my lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and when he has reached ground, encumbers him with help?" Johnson wrote.

This letter, now infamous, has frequently been referred to as literature's "Declaration of Independence," and was the symbolic beginning of our idea of artists as independent laborers who could depend upon public sales rather than moneyed patronage to support their lives and livelihoods.

Today we see our society moving towards both models at once. Crowdfunding and social media allow artists and makers direct access to their publics on an unpredicted scale — but the erosion of the middle class means that more and more art and

arts institutions are increasingly dependent upon the largesse of a new class of ultra-rich patrons.

Burning Man is straddling the crest of both waves. Founded entirely by volunteers and small-scale participant donations in its early years, funded almost entirely by ticket sales in its period of massive growth, it is now perhaps the largest hub for crowd-and-participant funded art in the world. At the same time, it is also famously the new favorite playground of the ultra-rich, who spend ungodly sums of money to do what the rest of us used to do on the cheap.

Anyone who has actually attended Burning Man knows the presence of the 1% in Black Rock City is significantly over-hyped by the media (is anything under-hyped?), and the vast majority of Burners would never know that Richie Rich's wealthier brother was on playa if people off-playa weren't complaining about it. But whether it's causation or correlation, the rise of the 1% at Burning Man does correspond very closely with an increase in the epic scale of the city's infrastructure, and its art.

As Black Rock City gets bigger, its art has gotten grander — and correspondingly more expensive. To be sure, it is still possible to have profoundly affecting art projects done on a small scale and without permission, but Burning Man has become increasingly associated with the kind of scale and spectacle that requires either a massive crowd-funding campaign or a very wealthy patron.

This is an uncomfortable tension, and may be unsustainable. It's also hard to talk about.

Art and money have never been separable, but somehow the idea of talking about them together has become a great taboo. We admire "starving artists" in a way that we would never endorse for "starving teachers" or "starving firemen." We have a notion

deeply embedded in our culture that anybody who talks about doing art for the money must not be a "real" artist. There's something to that, but it's also in part a modern concept. It certainly wasn't Dr. Johnson's view. He said, "No man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money."

The musicologist Peter Schickele once similarly pointed out, in a hilarious performance called "Bach Portrait," that most of the correspondence we have of the extraordinarily influential composer Johann Sebastian Bach (a contemporary of Dr. Johnson's) is not about music at all, but mostly complaining about the cost of living and the fact that his patrons didn't pay him on time.

So we've gone from a period where artists were hyper-aware of money, and open about it, to a period where artists talking about money endangers their status as "artists." This would be understandable, even laudable, if artists were actually less worried about money, but since they're not — since in fact we live in a time of profound economic uncertainty about artists and arts funding — this just won't do.

The 2016 theme of "da Vinci's Workshop" and Renaissance Florence is intended in no small part to violate this taboo and open this conversation. For the sake of artists, let alone society, we need to think about how we want arts to be funded, how we can do so in ways that are consistent with our values, and how we can create the impact on the arts and funding that we want to have in the world.

To be sure, no one wants to return to the days before Dr. Johnson's declaration of independence. Leonardo himself illustrates, in his refusal to talk politics, just how stifling that system could be. But not wanting to go back doesn't mean we can't learn from history — indeed it's one of the few things we can learn from. For all its faults, there are many ways in which the Renaissance is exactly what we want to look to for guidance

about both what to do and what not to do. If the 21st century is to have patrons, what are best practices for them? How can they be part of the solution, rather than a bottleneck for art and a source of anxiety for artists?

The Renaissance certainly teaches us that there was more than one kind of patron — and more than one reason for making art. While "patronage" today is virtually synonymous with "getting money from a rich guy," much of the greatest work of the Renaissance was paid for by the church, and many of Florence's most significant public treasures were paid for by its various guilds. If it was a period every bit as obsessed with money as ours, it was also a period when the most powerful institutions in society saw the creation of art as central to their missions. The glory of God and the state were tied in closely to the art created in their names; a nation or church without public art lacked a fundamental legitimacy. They were not doing their job. Nobility and merchants who did not engage with and support the arts were equally lacking. Money was a means to an end; simply accumulating money served no legitimate social good. Sponsoring art was an alchemy by which money transformed into a higher purpose.

Ironically, we live in an era that claims to value art for its own sake, but that also sees it as far more optional than the Renaissance did. The virulence of a Savonarola against art is only possible when you in fact take art seriously.

Our era has the potential for an unparalleled artistic renaissance. Not only is there plenty of money — if we can only figure out how to access and harness it — but our distribution networks for art and artists are leaps and bounds beyond anything ever envisioned before. We live in a time, to paraphrase Clive James, when it is possible to experience much of the greatest art ever created, for free, without even leaving your home.

Indeed, the ease and quality of the distribution network is part

of the problem. Possibly it's an even greater problem: many societies have tried to address issues of money, equality, and art before, but to my knowledge no society in history has needed to address the problem of art and culture being too easily accessible to everyone. That seems truly a first. It may be, when we dig deep, that some issues of money may not really be about money, much in the way some issues of sex are not really about sex.

But we won't know until we call them out.

We hope this theme will give Burning Man's legions of artists, doers, and creative thinkers permission to actively embrace this taboo and a space in which to explore these questions. What can we learn about the relationship between art and money from the Renaissance, and what can we do — what *must* we do — to embrace the potential of our own time to be the next Renaissance? Hopefully a renaissance as concerned with human dignity and agency as it is with technical advances and artistic accomplishment.

In the series of essays that follow, leading up to Burning Man 2016, we will be examining questions that we hope will offer insight and inspiration to anyone looking to address these issues or take on this theme.

Our history, like the histories of those before us, will be defined by our art. Virtually no one remembers Leonardo for his military engineering, but his paintings helped define an era and changed the world. It is a matter of historical record that the only reason anyone really remembers the 4th Earl of Chesterfield today is that Samuel Johnson made fun of him in a letter about an art project that altered the course of civilization.

It may be new technologies and economic forces that make our future possible, but it won't happen by accident. **We need a new Declaration of Independence for artists.**

Leonardo, Dr. Landrus tells us, viewed art as a guide to the future. He imagined things that did not exist so that he could build them. So, too, Burning Man: We study the Renaissance in order to imagine a new one. We imagine a new one in order to see if we can build it. In Black Rock City, and around the world.

Re-imagining the relationship between Art and Money, artists and funding, is how we begin.

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Section 1:

SISTER CITIES? EXAMINING BLACK ROCK CITY IN THE CONTEXT OF RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

FOLLOWING THE MONEY: THE FLORENTINE RENAISSANCE AND BLACK ROCK CITY

– Larry Harvey –

Sometime in the year 1490, Lorenzo de' Medici, the de facto ruler of Florence, took notice of a young man working in a trade guild workshop. This, in itself, was not remarkable. Lorenzo was an architect, poet and banker, as well as a politician: he was what is now called a renaissance man. His interests extended to painting and sculpture — nearly all of the civilized arts — and as a connoisseur, he had a knack for spotting talent. What is remarkable, however, is that the precocious young man he befriended was really a child; a boy of 15, and his name was Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni. Lorenzo offered Michelangelo's father a position at the palace and proposed that the apprentice join Lorenzo's family, to be raised as a son and educated with the Medici children.

From 1490 to 1492, Michelangelo attended the Humanist academy the Medicis had founded. More importantly, his newfound status now allowed him to consort with poets, scholars, artists, scientists, and philosophers. During his residency in the Medici household, the young Michelangelo kept a journal that he filled with poetry, and he was known to avow that these were the most important years of his life. Lorenzo had created a salon, a scene which formed the epicenter of a new Italian culture, and there is little doubt that this was fueled by money; the Medici were masters of an international banking network, and Florence's emergent middle class, organized around a system of art and craft guilds, sponsored competitions that rewarded artists for their work.

Money sluiced through the streets and piazzas of Renaissance

Florence, and yet the sheer hydraulic force of capital did not determine every outcome. Money was a means, but not an end. What mattered most was social interaction in the context of a networked culture driven by ideals, and Burning Man may be regarded in a similar light. One way to fathom this phenomenon is to follow the money. In 2016, Black Rock City will distribute 1.2 million dollars to artists in the form of honoraria. In so doing, it is like the Wool Guild, the *Arte della lana*, the premier trade guild of Florence. Along with banking, it was one of the two great pillars that supported the Florentine economy, and a significant portion of this wealth was lavished on civic art that was available to every citizen.

There isn't any doubt this institution's funds derived from the manufacture and sale of high-end luxury goods. Florence's wealthiest families spent up to forty percent of their income on apparel worn at social gatherings and popular public events. They did this out of family pride and to secure prestige among their peers. That pride, however, overlapped with public spirit — it led to the production of creative work that cradled widespread social interaction; it sustained and enlarged the identity of an entire people, and it is fair to say that without this flow of money there would have been no Renaissance, no quickening of knowledge, no spread of humanist ideals.

In the case of Burning Man, such quasi-governmental patronage does not exhaust resources that are devoted to art. As with competitions sponsored by the Wool Guild, Black Rock City's honoraria are awarded by a small committee, but this curatorship, as practiced by a few, is counterbalanced by a radically populist patronage. Each year many artist groups will subsidize their projects through community fundraising events and crowd-sourced campaigns on the Internet. Some critics say that Burning Man should shoulder all of these expenses, but we have found that self-initiated efforts create constituencies, loyal networks that support these artists on and off the playa.

This has produced a flow of art that's issued out of Black Rock City in the form of privately commissioned work, civic installations, and exhibitions subsidized by festivals. Now this surge of money in support of art is going global. One example is the work of the Temple Crew as led by David Best, with help from the Artichoke Trust, the Burning Man Project, a robust crowd-sourcing campaign, and contributions by a host of public institutions. David's 21-person crew joined with 98 local volunteers to create a temple in the heart of Derry, an Irish city long-torn by violent struggles between and Protestants and Catholics. According to Artichoke's website, "Up to 60,000 visitors wrote personal messages… filling the inside with pictures of loved ones, handwritten messages, and symbols of peace". This was a culture-bearing effort that embodied all of Burning Man's Ten Principles.

Private philanthropy also plays a role in the elaboration of Black Rock City's culture. As stated in this year's art theme text, "Over many years, private donors, with a remarkable lack of fanfare, have quietly funded some of the most beloved artworks that have honored our city." When Lorenzo de' Medici adopted the young Michelangelo into his family, he did much more than hire on a hand to serve his needs. Private patronage is personal; it is immediate and intimate, and what is true of Florence and our temporary city is also true of every celebrated art scene ever known. One example is the relationship of a famous heiress, Peggy Guggenheim, and Jackson Pollock, a struggling painter. Peggy paid the painter's daily bills, bought his work when no one else would, and organized his first art show. At a soirée held in her home, she even let him pee in her fireplace (though not on the carpet).

Some critics label wealthy Burners as outsiders, but Burning Man has always attracted outliers, adventurers from every walk of life. Amid the ranks of moneyed patrons, many people understand that the essential value of a work of art cannot be charted on a balance sheet. Instead of clutching at a fetishized

commodity, they contribute to the ongoing life of art as it moves through society. Moreover, this behavior isn't limited to rarified salons, such as the scene created by Lorenzo in the Medici Palace. Examine industrial districts inhabited by modern-day bohemians. Here, amid graffitied walls and dumpster treasure troves, one is likely to detect the presence of a trustifarian — a benefactor with a trust fund — who discretely funnels money into artist's pockets.

These varied streams of income moving through our city irrigate a fertile social field. Burning Man is an enormous art school, and in this it very much resembles the Republic of Florence and its system of guilds. We ask participants applying for an honorarium to describe their involvement in our community, and these accounts reveal a now familiar pattern. They speak of experience gained from creating art at events within our regional communities. And just as frequently, they describe an informal and spontaneous apprenticeship system. People volunteer to work with more established artists on the playa, and almost inevitably there occurs a seminal moment in these narratives when these applicants declare that they are now prepared to graduate and step out on their own, hastening to add that they have gathered a qualified group of collaborators around them.

This churning scene of interaction is fed by one last flood of money, since more than half of the art that appears in Black Rock City is self-funded by participants who don't receive a subsidy. Expand this category to include Theme Camps, art cars and thousands of impromptu performances, and it is clear that in a society devoted to the giving of gifts, anyone at any time can be both artist and philanthropist. The flowering of Florence in the 15th century produced a new society that valued initiative and creative expression, even as it stressed communal effort and civic engagement. Most of all, this was a movement animated by ideals that citizens of Florence had retrieved from the past. And if we examine our own ideals, as described by the

Ten Principles, it is apparent they express this same dynamic balance between individual action and collective identity.

Many people think of Black Rock City as a moneyless utopia. By forswearing money during one week in the desert, they feel they've found redemption in a fallen world. This ignores the obvious fact that in coming to the desert and preparing to participate, they have spent at least as much in the marketplace as the Burning Man organization spends in creating our city. As evidenced by Florence, civilization isn't possible without widespread commercial activity. We retreat into the desert every year to contemplate those things in life that are beyond all price, that kind of immediate experience that has an unconditional value: this is why we have suspended commerce in our city. But if Burning Man is to be more than a refuge, and if we believe that it is destined to do work in the world, we should invest our efforts in creating a society that conditions how money behaves.

If there is a moral here, it is that money isn't moral. It is not inherently good, it is not irretrievably bad; it is like water as it tumbles in its pell-mell progress through our world. But money can be canalized by culture; it can be made to serve non-monetary values in a way that's self-sustaining. This is well illustrated by the history of Florence. Over a span of three generations, a city no larger than our own, with a population comparable to that of Black Rock City, produced a staggering number of geniuses: Giotto, Ghiberti, Brunelleschi, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci — this alone was enough to influence the course of Western civilization for five hundred years. It can be claimed that this was adventitious, the result of historic circumstances that can never be replicated, but it may be that Florence simply got things right. We often say our city is a Petri dish, an experiment devoted to creating culture and community. Perhaps it is now time to take this audacious experiment one step further and begin to imagine a greater and more civilized world.

THE RENAISSANCE'S $ECRET WEAPON FOR ARTS FUNDING

– Caveat Magister –

If you think the economy is weighed in favor of the rich now, you should have seen the Renaissance.

Not only was it still a feudal system where people could essentially own other people; not only was there no social safety net; but in Renaissance Florence, as Tim Parks describes extensively in *Medici Money*, the rich and the poor actually used separate currencies.

"The picciolo was the currency of the poor, the salary of the worker, the price of a piece of bread. Luxury goods, wholesaling, international trade, these were the exclusive realm of the golden florin. By law. A man who dealt in piccioli had a long way to go."

It was possible to exchange the currencies, but only at banks and only with a significant fee built in. Meanwhile since the wealthy earned florins but paid salaries in picciolo, there was always an incentive to devalue the picciolo, making wages cheaper to pay for — and making the poor poorer.

This, of course, is manifestly unjust and even horrifying. But it also tells us something about the relationship of money to society in the Renaissance, because well, ask yourself: why did it stop? Why don't we have a system like this today?

Is it because we're so much more egalitarian today than Renaissance Florence? Sure — I mean, we're no longer a feudal society in any formal way. But beyond that: we don't have currencies based on social standing anymore because that defeats the whole point of currencies.

The purpose of currencies is to facilitate the exchange of goods and services — to generate wealth — in as simple a manner as possible. The more hoops a currency has to jump through, the more currency exchanges you have to make, the less effective a currency is and the less wealth it can generate.

This was a challenge constantly faced by Renaissance Florence, which had to manage two sets of fiscal and monetary policies, had to figure out elaborate ways to both get the currencies exchanged and to keep them from being exchanged. It was a drain on their banks and their global trading.

They did it anyway. And therein lies perhaps the fundamental difference between the way we think about money in the modern age and the way they thought about it in the Renaissance: we try to keep cultural order from getting in the way of the free flow of money, while Renaissance Florence tried to keep the flow of money from getting in the way of their cultural order.

On the one hand, this could be brutal: creating separate currencies to match social stratification is a fundamental assault on individual liberty. On the other hand, it served a vital social function: money kept flowing through the system, out of the hands of the wealthy and into the rest of society, including and especially artists.

There were vast concentrations of wealth in the Renaissance, to be sure, but the modern idea that someone can get legitimacy form simply being wealthy — that collected capital is its own reward — was an anathema to Renaissance society. 20th century Communists had nothing on Renaissance Christians when it came to a suspicion of the rich.

“There was a tendency (in the Renaissance) to see wealth itself, or the process of getting rich, as possibly anti-Christian,” Parks said.

After all: "Again I tell you," sayeth the Lord, "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." Jesus was not particularly ambiguous on this point. Yet the Renaissance loved prosperity writ large: poverty could be a virtue for individuals but not for society.

(Also, notice that distinction: poverty could be a **virtue**. Outside of the still clinging view that it's okay for artists to starve for their art, is there any less modern of a sentiment? Philip Rieff once wrote: "There was a time when a man's virtue could be discerned from how few desires he had. That time will never come again.")

So what is a society that wants the benefits brought by prosperity but has a deep suspicion of both concentrated wealth and the process by which it is accumulated to do?

The Renaissance's ingenious solution was to make the practices that led to wealth illegal enough to penalize but not illegal enough to stop — and to tie the state of a rich man's soul (and his place in the social order) to the public good he did with his wealth.

Medici Money uses pawn shops an example of how the former system works. The society didn't want to permit them — they preyed upon the needy — but it also needed them to function.

"Making no attempt to hide his profit, the pawnbroker, whether Christian or Jew, is a 'manifest usurer' and so cannot belong to the Exchangers' Guild and cannot be given a license to trade. But he can be fined. Or rather, they can. For this 'detestable sin,' as the city's government deems it, a fine of 2,000 florins a year is imposed on all the Florentine pawnbrokers as a group. Payment exempts them from any further tax or punishment. The theologians can debate whether this arrangement amounts to granting a license or not."

This system applied all the way up the ladder. Oxford scholar Dr. Matthew Landrus, who specializes in the study of Renaissance artists and intellectuals, told us that "If you're a banker, and you're guilty of usury, you would expect to spend a good portion of the money from those transactions of that creating a chapel or some other religious or public good."

In a sense it was the inverse of our system of government taxation: where today plutocrats ask themselves "am I paying too much in taxes? Is there a way I could pay less?" plutocrats of the Renaissance were constantly asking themselves: "Have I done enough? Am I sure that I've given away enough to avoid hell and condemnation?"

Was there a level of hypocrisy here? Obviously, but Oscar Wilde called hypocrisy "the tribute vice pays to virtue," and you can power a whole society on it. Time and again, Renaissance culture found behaviors that were both dangerous to the social fabric and instrumental in generating prosperity — particularly the various forms of usury — and instead of banishing them outright it found ways to punish them that ensured the generated wealth was spread out into the population.

This is not to say that these punishments were toothless or insincere: on the contrary, it was an incredibly delicate balancing act, one that the rich apparently lost a great deal of sleep over. A push too far, and the consequences could be dire. In 1437 Florence put the hammer down and outright banned all Christians from owning pawn shops.

For Christian pawn shop owners the worst had come to pass, but even this was a kind of two-step around the issue: there were still Jews, and so there were still pawn shops. That's the point: Renaissance culture was not simply going to give up the tools they needed to achieve prosperity — they loved prosperity — but they were quite willing to make prosperity harder on themselves if they felt a cultural taboo was being violated in a

way that had become unbalancing.

The result was that instead of hoarding wealth, the well-to-do were constantly on the hook to support the poor, the church, and the arts. But more than that: the best patrons weren't just "on the hook," they wanted to contribute. They were passionate about making a difference, creating culture for the ages, and found a profound sense of meaning in the supporting the arts. The system was hypocritical, but it was also passionately and meaningfully engaged.

How was the Renaissance so much more adept at creating a balancing act than we are today? Part of it, of course, is that it never would have occurred to them not establish this balance: once you don't see the accumulation of money for its own sake as a virtue, of course you're going to find ways to limit the damage it can cause. Money was not an unconditional good for their society the way it often seems to have become for ours.

More than that, however, it was possible because the world that the people of the Renaissance inhabited had fundamentally different assumptions, and a different mindset.

In the Renaissance mindset, the world was finite — it had a clear beginning and a clear end, Landrus said. It was bound: space was plentiful but limited. And human beings were at the center of it all.

"That gave the world a teleology" (a sense of meaningful function and purpose), Landrus told us. "Man was responsible for the universe, and his actions were a microcosm of it. That means that your actions in the polis were very important. It's something that, to modern thinking, is very difficult to understand: today there isn't that sense of a finite end or a center of things."

The modern mind sees the world as open ended, infinite, and

without boundaries, and that means that nothing you do really matters to the big picture. When you're swimming in an ocean, nothing you do can possibly seem like it impacts the whole. But in a small pond the actions of every fish creates ripples that can be felt.

The implications for how the rich should behave follows that difference: if you live in a finite world, the way money is spent is everyone's business because everyone is directly impacted. To hold on to ill-gotten wealth is to do damage to the whole. There is no ability to just live and let live. But if you exist in a world without boundaries, then nothing you do really matters to the big picture — and so there's no reason not to do it.

It's hard to imagine advocating for a return to the Renaissance mindset: the same worldview that created an unshakeable impetus for the rich to dedicate their wealth to the arts and the public good also enforced strict codes about women and sex and personal freedoms of all kinds. The world has benefited tremendously from shaking the idea that individualism is an affront to the natural order.

But it also presents a problem that the Renaissance didn't have. If nothing really matters, then there's no clear way to be in the world. "How do people want to leave their mark in today's world?" Landrus asks. "How do they do that?"

It's something we can see the hyper-rich struggling with now: Billionaires like Warren Buffett and Bill Gates have been trying to redefine philanthropy in the 21st century, and directly challenged other modern plutocrats to leave most of their money to charity instead of their descendants. New firms are springing up in Silicon Valley to help tech barons find cost-effective causes to support. The new rich are looking for new ways to contribute meaningfully.

But nothing comparable to the Renaissance ethos of money has yet emerged: right now, at least, philanthropy on the scale of

a Gates or a Buffet is seen as a noble idiosyncrasy rather than as part of a compelling worldview, and Silicon Valley is neither known as a philanthropic center nor for its public works. Indeed, a case strong case can be made that forces of social stratification are pushing the wealthy away from the common bonds of community, not towards it. Lacking a clear ethos of money, we don't really have a clear sense of how to both be rich and to belong to the common community in the 21st century.

Is it possible to have an ethos of money in the post-modern era that serves both social needs for money to keep flowing through the system and the desire of (some of) the hyper-rich to use their fortunes to have a positive impact and leave a meaningful legacy?

The jury's still out, but it's worth noticing something — you're probably picked up on it already. Burning Man, which at this point is one of the largest generators of new public art in the world (particularly when you factor in regional events), has conditions that are remarkably like those of the Renaissance mindset.

It is a world with clear boundaries in both time and space — literally fenced in and lasting only a week. It is a place where even small actions and decisions can have an enormous impact on the individuals and communities around you: a place where what you do personally clearly matters. You are relevant. It is a place that is utterly suffused with meaning, even if no one necessarily agrees on what it is.

Burning Man's community standards are significantly lighter than those of the Renaissance — but it is still a place where the community standards matter very much. It's not just that people police them for others — if you leave MOOP, people will comment; if you go around at night without illumination, someone will give you sparklies (or yell at you for being a darktard) — it's that most people internalize them. People go

out of their way to leave no trace, they put gifting and self-expression at the center of what they do. They take inclusion seriously.

It would be easy to make too much of these similarities, but they are suggestive. Perhaps the slogan "think globally, act locally" is only half right. It may be that when we experience a circumscribed world, a world where our actions give us more of a sense of direct and meaningful relevance, that an ethos of money more conducive to a vibrant arts scene emerges. Passionate engagement with the arts might not come out of a system in which people see themselves as victims of vast impersonal forces, but do emerge out of a system in which people see themselves as a meaningful part of a community and a world where their actions matter. And of course that's going to change how they spend their time and money.

The globe, let alone the infinite universe, may be too large to create the sense of immediacy that a vibrant cultural scene requires. Renaissance artists and patrons absolutely had their eyes on history, they wanted to conquer the world, but history and the world were much smaller. Perhaps the ethos of money that we require in the modern world requires us to think locally sometimes.

Section 2:

BUILDING BLOCKS OF A SUCCESSFUL RENAISSANCE

WHAT POWERED THE RENAISSANCE?
(WHAT WAS ITS RELATIONSHIP TO CASH?)

– Caveat Magister –

We know that money can't buy happiness (though it often doesn't hurt), and we know that it can't buy talent (though again …).

But can it buy a Renaissance?

Can money buy a thriving art scene that isn't just busy in the present, but worth remembering in the future? Or is that exactly what's outside its power?

According to Eric Weiner, author of *The Geography of Genius*, the answer is right in front of us: city-states like Qatar and Dubai are spending sums of money that were unimaginable to Renaissance kings on art and architecture … and sure, the buildings are cool, but nobody really thinks they're relevant. Las Vegas casinos throw gobs of money on artisans and creative endeavors … but while it's turned Vegas into a tourist destination, nobody takes them seriously.

Disneyland is probably spending more money than the whole Renaissance several times over — but "Disneyland" is exactly what no one wants an art scene to turn into.

In fact, the current model of arts and economic development has "art" coming before "money" — artists congregate in a place (a Brooklyn, a San Francisco), transform it into a thriving scene, and it is the scene that attracts big money … eventually gentrifying the artists themselves out.

So our modern answer is "no," an art scene isn't powered by money. It's ruined by money.

The artists of the Renaissance, however, had a very different

answer — so different that they probably never would have asked the question at all.

"The disdain for money arises from the romantic obsession that a work should be independent, inspirational, and above all opposed to the status quo, and so in a certain sense, however anarchically or idiosyncratically, political," said Tim Parks, author of *Medici Money: Banking, Metaphysics, and Art in Fifteenth Century Florence*. "These ideas were simply not around in the 14th and 15th centuries."

Remember, Parks said: painting and sculpture require tools and materials — which cost money. Nor is it an accident that the vast public art projects we look back on as a high water mark in Florence occurred during a period when the city was leading Europe in new approaches to banking — and flush with filthy lucre.

Dr. Matthew Landrus, an Oxford University scholar who specializes in artists of the Renaissance, goes so far to say the Renaissance was powered "primarily by economic factors. The economic benefits to Florence from trade — in terms of skill sets and training, in terms of developing leading studios that could do things other places couldn't — that had a lot to do with the success of the banking industry."

Nor it is a coincidence that many other vital and historically important "scenes" coincided with flush times: the Harlem Renaissance happened during the Roaring '20s, not the Great Depression. The Belle Epoch was likewise fabulously wealthy.

There is an undeniable correlation between the flow of money and the vitality of an art and cultural scene — one that Renaissance and contemporary artists interpret very differently. But what is the underlying relationship?

A close examination of periods of cultural genius, like that undertaken by Weiner, suggests there are key factors to a

thriving arts scene that money can in fact enable and bring to fruition, but that money can also destroy.

The Three D's

Broadly speaking, Weiner told us, his research suggests that there are three key elements to the creation of a scene likely to create "cultural genius."

The first is **Diversity**.

This doesn't just mean ethnic and racial diversity — though it does mean that — but it must mean intellectual diversity. The scene must be full of different ideas and ways of thinking that one can bump into and can't always casually dismiss.

Renaissance Florence didn't get diversity because it had money, but the trade and banking practices that made it wealthy also opened it up to global goods and cultures, and that made a huge difference.

"In Florence they were traveling as far as Afghanistan to get the dyes for their cloth business. The Athenians were great travelers and sailors," Weiner said. "Places that don't have free trade rarely have free ideas."

Landrus agreed, saying that it was that openness to the world (along with a steady influx of money) that allowed them to recruit many of the leading artistic geniuses of the time. This brought not only geniuses, but geniuses who were thinking in different terms than the local artists and population, creating a fruitful mix of ideas.

But even beyond the importing of talent, the simple exposure to new ideas and ways of thinking has profound benefits. Research published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology indicates that "[i]nput from alien cultures might stimulate exceptional national achievements." In a study they conducted

on creative flourishing in Japanese history, it was clear that significant advances occurred following periods of openness to outside cultures and influences — even if there weren't many actual foreign immigrants living in Japan. Exposure to new ways of thinking and problem solving itself leads to creative flourishing.

Another way in which Florence had diversity was in its economy itself: it had enormous wealth, yes, but unlike our contemporary Silicon Valley or Hollywood, it wasn't a one-industry town. Textile manufacturing was a major source of wealth, but, by the Medici period, so was banking, with the more traditional banking centers in Italy having shifted from Siena to Florence, Dr. Landrus notes. The church was likewise a source of enormous institutional wealth, and eventually the arts themselves became a kind of economic powerhouse.

And while "democracy" in Florence was often a farce, as *Medici Money* so deftly illustrates, the constant shifting of committees and leadership — even if ultimately among the members of a limited number of family — meant that fresh eyes and perspectives were constantly looking at old problems.

"Many vital institutions, like the Opera del Duomo, required turnover every few years of leadership," Weiner said. It's likely no coincidence that these institutions were often responsible for the development of major civic treasures still honored and cherished today.

Also important was the concept of a "Renaissance man" itself — the idea that the ideal intellect was exposed to many fields. Engineers should know poetry and bankers painting. Artists should be scientists. Not everyone met this ideal — most people probably didn't — but when it was ideal to be a generalist, that helped promote cross-pollination of disciplines to a significant degree. Specialists were chided, not exalted.

The second "d" is **Discernment**

“All of the societies I’ve studied that cultivated genius,” Weiner told us, “were colanders for sifting out crap. None of these places argued that all art was equally good. Or all philosophy.”

“An open, tolerant place isn’t enough,” he went on. “That’s just a mish-mash. There has to be discerning and separating, as a group. That can be harsh, but it’s necessary.”

The Renaissance was blessed, at least for a period of time, by a high quality of patron who was both risk-taking and discerning. “Cosimo de’ Medici was a great patron,” Tim Parks said, “in part because he had his personal reasons for wanting to use art to reinforce his position with the church and society in general and in part because he was genuinely fascinated by painting, sculpture and architecture, but without imagining that he knew better than the artist.”

It was a quality of patron that Florence had an abundance of for some time. Does that happen by accident?

Weiner thinks it wasn’t an accident, in no small part because Renaissance society valued artists so highly. He quotes Plato: “What is honored in a country is cultivated there.”

18th and 19th century Vienna didn’t get Mozart and Beethoven and multiple generations of Strausses by accident; it got them because the society elevated musicians and took a profound pride in whether its music was both high quality and cutting edge. 20th century America didn’t get Steve Jobs by accident; he came out of a time when there was incredible government and industry pressure to enhance technology and make sure that America was never behind on another metaphorical space race.

“These geniuses are cultivated by us,” Weiner said.

How do we cultivate discernment? Well, money and honor both do go a long way. But there are other approaches.

Everyone we've spoken to about Renaissance Florence emphasized how frequently it resorted to competitions to sort the wheat from the chaff. They wanted a clash of ideas, and they wanted the best to succeed. No one was grandfathered in.

But Weiner pointed out a corollary to that: failure was not held against the competitors, and "there was a place for the losers to go." There was always more work available, more competition, another avenue to explore.

This is essential, Weiner suggests, because the more high-stakes these contests get — the more society clearly separates into "winners" and "losers" on the basis of just a few metrics — the more cultural caution is going to develop. If you've only got one shot, you'd be a fool to try something people might not like. You're going to stick with what everybody agrees is a good idea.

It is when stakes are not life and death — when failure won't cost you everything and you know you'll be able to try again — that people are more likely to pursue a unique or surprising vision, and offer real alternatives to the received wisdom.

"Societies that cultivate genius give second chances, multiple chances," Weiner said "Losers need avenues to do things. We say we believe in second chances in this country, but I'm not sure if we really do."

The third "d" is **Disorder**. And this gets ugly.

"There's usually some sort of stirring of the pot before a significant age of genius," Weiner said. "Often it's something very negative. In Athens, the city was sacked by the Persians, and rebuilding it was really Athens' golden age. In Florence, it was the city getting savaged by the Black Death. That was followed two generations later by the Renaissance."

"Negative" is an understatement here. The plague wiped out

an estimated third of Europe's population. That's an obscenely high price to pay for a good art scene.

But the principle still applies: after things have been shaken up, greater creativity and a sense of purpose that leads to greater discernment often appear. Disruption can be inspirational.

But, Weiner cautions, only up to a point. Greater creativity happens after disruption, not during it. At some point it has to stop. "Chaos is a phase you go through between orders," he told us. "The Renaissance didn't happen during the plague!"

Indeed, Dr. Landrus emphasized that the Italian Renaissance was led by those city-states that had the greatest stability, not the least.

"Renaissance cities generally were possible thanks very much to the Peace at Lodi in 1454," he told us. "While not 'at peace' in the sense that we would think of it today — the rivalries between cities like Florence, Milan, and Venice was very real, and had real consequences — this relative peace allowed these various cities to continue without military conflict, and to continue economically."

By contrast, cities like Naples, which were in a semi-constant state of warfare at the time, did not develop nearly so significant a scene; the climate of disorder and constant threat of destruction was too great.

Disorder, then, while a genuine necessity, is also a cure that can be worse than the disease. Happy is the era that has just enough disorder to stimulate creativity and art, but no more.

While surely an oversimplification at some level, it's clear how this structure — Diversity, Discernment, and Disorder — can be used as a guide to understand how money can supercharge art scenes, and how it can kill them.

How Much Genius for a Dollar?

To the extent that money brings in diversity — enhancing immigration and travel, creating new communities alongside old ones, and bringing people with different backgrounds and perspectives together on common projects — it can be an engine that powers an art scene.

But when money creates gated communities, gentrification, and epistemic closure it sounds a death knell for creativity and the local creative class.

To the extent that money is used to take chances in pursuit of excellence, it can be a boon to artists and the cultural landscape. To the extent that money conflates "bigger" with "better," "repetition" with "excellence," and circulates only among a select few rather than as a bridge to new talent, a scene is better off without it.

And to the extent money is the cause or result of a brief period of disruption, opening the door for new ideas to come forward, it is a tough but effective medicine. But when it creates a continuous climate of disruption in which no one has a chance to catch their breath, let alone develop best practices or inspiration, then it is simply cruel.

The Renaissance was powered by money.

Burning Man? Honestly, the jury's still out. A legitimate debate can be had as to whether Burning Man's increasing arts funding is being spent in ways that will best support its artistic community.

But right now it seems abundantly clear that in our larger society vast sums of money are being used to build gated, gentrified, and segregated communities — both literally and intellectually — that reduce diversity; that there is no clear sense of discernment across large institutions or donors when

it comes to art; and that "disruption" is not just present, but a code word for whole industries, industries that on the one hand have unleashed tremendous creativity, but on the other are making it increasingly difficult for many communities to find the stability that they need to harness that creativity.

The problem isn't that money is involved with art and creativity: the problem is that the 21st-century West is doing something profoundly wrong that the 15th century West got profoundly right. What did they know that we don't? Can we turn that around?

HOW BURNERS ARE REINVENTING THE ARTISTS' WORKSHOP

– Stuart Mangrum –

One of the defining features of Burning Man art is its collaborative and inclusive nature, offering would-be artists the chance to learn by doing in a group environment. To those of us raised with the peculiar 20th century notion that art can only be learned in Art School, and that making art and making a living are irreconcilable, this may seem like a novel idea. But history shows that artists have been joining forces to teach, learn, and work cooperatively since classical times, and that it's only in the recent past that art-market dynamics have pushed collectivist approaches to the fringes.

In Leonardo's time, art had yet to be distinguished from craft, and the craft of art was acquired in a process common to all trades, by apprenticeship to a master and years of toil in his workshop. Before becoming masters in their own right, Leonardo worked under Verrocchio, Michelangelo under Ghirlandaio, and Raphael under Perugino. In addition to technical skills, learned mostly by careful imitation, they presumably picked up the business skills required to operate a workshop and the social connections needed to secure commissions.

In much the same way that art and tradecraft were still conjoined, so too were the lines blurred between what we now think of as art, engineering, and architecture. Though we like to remember Leonardo for his works of sculpture and painting, it was his skill as a military engineer and architect that put the bread on his workshop's table. The design and fabrication skills required to create a monumental work of sculpture were not all that different from those needed to create fortifications or weapons systems, and moreover were often likely to be commissioned by the same aristocratic patron. It is not particularly ironic that Leonardo's massive equestrian statue, the Gran Cavallo,

commissioned by the Duke of Milan as a tribute to his father's military triumphs, was never built because the bronze was needed to cast more cannon.

Just as the Renaissance marks a historical turning point in what we now think of as "art," it also saw the first salvo of challenges to the centuries-old workshop business model. The rise of mercantile wealth created new demand for art, broadening the buyer pool to include not just the Church and aristocrats but business entities and the nouveau riche. While Leonardo and Michelangelo continued in the service of kings and popes, their rival Raphael seized this new opportunity, adapting his enterprise in a way that presaged much that was to come. Though clearly a great artist in his own right, he also seems to have been a master marketer who pioneered the role of celebrity artist-impresario. At the height of his popularity he is said to have employed as many as fifty apprentices in his workshop, and seems to have spent most of his time socializing with clients.

This model of production — a workshop fronted by a master and funded by a relatively small group of wealthy clients — endured for many years, and its shape can still be seen in the organization of modern architecture firms and design agencies. In the world of art, however, it had all but vanished by the mid-19th century. The demand for art products surged in the wake of the industrial revolution, and a new market structure emerged to serve it, characterized by commercial art galleries, for-profit art schools, and critical tastemakers in the academy and media. Reacting to this new economic landscape, and to what they saw as an increasing industrialization of art, a group of English romantics including the painter John Millais formed the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which urged a return to earlier models of authentic expression and unmediated production. One of their best-known adherents, William Morris, incorporated many of these ideas into the Arts and Crafts movement.

Yet while the decorative arts steered back toward a workshop ethic, the fine art market by contrast became increasingly focused on the individual artist as a commercial celebrity, able to sell products based solely on the power of his personal brand. The first of these international art superstars was probably Salvador Dali, whose gifts as an artist were surpassed only by his genius as a self-promoter. At the height of his fame, Dali is said to have made millions by simply signing his name to stacks of blank lithograph paper for posthumous printing. This kind of larger-than-life imagemaking allows no room for sharing credit, but that doesn't necessarily mean that Dali worked unassisted. According to one poison-pen account, he secretly kept a staff of young artists busy with all his production work, and hardly lifted a brush after 1950.

While Dali may have relegated the workshop to the status of dirty secret, it took Andy Warhol to discredit it completely, through irony. By dubbing his studio the Factory, he made art out of the business of turning art into a business, and by dubbing his entourage "superstars," made a joke out of exploiting these would-be celebrities as he put them to work on his screen-press assembly line. Jeff Koons took this industrial logic one step further, bidding out his production work to contract manufacturers and adopting a fully outsourced model. The making of art was now a solo endeavor, celebrity-driven and effectively divorced from the teaching of art, which was a multi-billion dollar industry in its own right.

Yet collectivization never completely disappeared; it persisted at the outlaw fringes. By the close of the century, when Burners started making art in the Black Rock desert, many of them were already working in collaborative groups. One of the most obvious examples is Survival Research Labs, the seminal machine-art crew headed by Mark Pauline. Though Pauline himself was never involved with Burning Man, a number of early Burner artists honed their design and fabrication skills in his San Francisco workshop. The Cacophony Society, too, can be viewed as a sort of art collective, focused on Dadaesque

performance and interactive anti-art. Likewise the Billboard Liberation Front, the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, and other collaborative groups from the fin-de-siècle San Francisco scene all contributed organizational DNA to the emerging Burner genome.

Burning Man has been described as a "permission engine," and it's certainly true that many come away from the event with a newly found "I could do that" attitude towards art. The self-suppression of one's creative drive in the name of economic common sense, so typical in a society where the odds of making a living as an artist are lottery-slim, is overcome by the urge for radical self-expression, and people allow themselves, often for the first time since childhood, the license to create. And since this is Burning Man, and not the mainstream art world, they have a wealth of resources to leverage in the journey, in fact an entire alternate art ecosystem that has emerged from the culture in response to this need.

The weird imperative of creating Burning Man art has helped drive the formation of numerous collectives that, like the medieval workshops, combine collaborative effort on large-scale art projects with active teaching and learning of craft. Groups like the Flaming Lotus Girls and Flux Foundation are as much about making artists as making art. And there are the cooperative industrial studios and build spaces like Nimby, American Steel, The Generator, and the various incarnations of [freespace], where the focus is on making rather than teaching, but where by the natural osmosis of adjacency Burning Man artists tend to exchange ideas and skills, and wind up working on each others' projects. It is no accident that the Burner and Maker communities are so deeply intertwined — we are all learning to apply new tools and technologies to creative challenges. As I wrote in an earlier post about this year's theme, "It is a hallmark of our community that in order to turn the fruits of one's imagination into action in the world, new skills often need to be acquired." Many of these skills simply are not

taught in art schools, or are just starting to be introduced. This is reflected in the growing popularity of alternative, not-for-profit, Burner-flavored learning institutions like The Crucible and Gray Area.

In each of these neocollectivist approaches, there are echoes of the Renaissance workshop system. Leonardo might not recognize it as such, but it's easy to imagine that if he were alive today, he and his crew would be living and working together in Black Rock City. And they might even be able to crowdsource enough bronze to get that horse made.

Section 3:

WHERE MY MATRONS AT? ART, GENDER, AND THE RENAISSANCE

INTRODUCTION

– Felicity Graham –

When the subject of the Renaissance and the system of patronage comes up in discussion, inevitably it evokes images of a gilded age of art, music, philosophy and the flowering of religious thought. It brings to mind certain names, artists like Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Palestrina, Durer, Bosch, as well as patrons such as Lorenzo de' Medici — all of whose contributions to art are unquestionable…and all of whom are male.

This didn't happen by chance; it was no accident or unhappy circumstance. The same social and economic systems that promoted the system of patronage simultaneously deceased access to both economic systems and the arts for women, serving not only as a gatekeeper to artists of the period, but severely influencing the narrative of the period — even five-hundred years later.

Why is this important? Certainly, the fact that women have historically been excluded from the arts is hardly new information. The issue at hand is much deeper than that, however. Aside from the fact that few people — even in academic circles — are aware of the true depth of such a vital human rights issue in history, if Burning Man is looking to the Renaissance as a potential model for future arts funding, it needs to have both sides of the patronage story.

No discussion of arts funding can afford to ignore the possibility of (even unintentional) gatekeeping and the restriction of expression that inevitably follows. Censorship often wears a subtle guise, altering the conversation not by restricting what people say, but by simply curating who gets to *speak*.

The Magnificent Exception

A male-dominant narrative of art and patronage in the Renaissance has traditionally put forth that women had the opportunity and circumstances yet simply never made truly significant contributions to either category, a view that was broadly accepted by scholars in the field for many decades. Though any extended consideration of that theory suggests that it is, at the very least, lacking nuance, it remained the dominant narrative, essentially unchallenged until the 1970s, when the new wave of female scholarship in art history and the Renaissance began to challenge the prevailing narrative.

Unlike many cultural narratives, this one has a definitive source: a 19th century art historian named Jacob Burckhardt, a man generally credited with having fathered the modern Renaissance scholarship movement. Burckhardt's work, which — despite severe criticism — lately enjoys a renaissance of its own, has colored the basic perceptions of female status during the Renaissance. In his *Civilisation of the Renaissance*, Burckhardt states as fact that "women stood on a footing of perfect equality with men," and further, that "there was no question of 'women's rights' or female emancipation, simply because the thing itself was a matter of course."

That's certainly a warm, fuzzy view of the situation — a comfortable idea that excuses the lack of further examination or analysis of the issue, but which, when the period is studied in any depth, seems highly suspect. Indeed, it even contradicts descriptions written by Renaissance-era writers, themselves. One such, Giorgio Vasari (b. 1511), widely considered to be the father of art history, wrote of the challenges that faced female artists at the time, testifying both to the excellence of many female artists, while acknowledging the obstacles in their way.

In his collection of artist biographies, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, e architettori da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostril (Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects,*

from Cimabue to Our Times), Vasari writes about one female artist, *suor* Plautilla Nelli, an abbess. Though he praises her work and discusses how widely it was distributed, he also notes that she could have achieved even greater things — "as men are able to do" — if she'd had both the time and access to the type of study and practice male artists had.

Women like *suor* Plautilla are often seen as the "magnificent exception" to the norm, a term used by Germaine Greer in her seminal work about the social and political issues which intersect with female artists and artistry, *The Obstacle Race* (1979). But is it possible that there were far more female patrons, artists and artisans than previously supposed? And if so, how did their experience differ from that of their male counterparts?

This three-part series intends to explore those questions, with the goal of giving an overview of the environment, influence and experience of the Renaissance woman in the arts. Part one, **Mrs. Cellophane**, will address the socio-political consequences of the philosophical movement that spawned the golden age of patronage. Part two, **Take Me to Church**, will discuss how male and female patronage ("matronage," if you will) differed, and what "matronage" looked like in the Renaissance. Finally, part three, **Losing My Religion**, will tackle the Renaissance artist herself — content, audience, patronage, reputation and reception.

ART, GENDER, AND THE RENAISSANCE:
WHERE MY MATRONS AT?
PART 1: MRS. CELLOPHANE

– Felicity Graham –

What a Difference a Century Makes

The ideology that shaped the brave new world of the Renaissance was obsessed with the ideal: the ideal state, the ideal social structure, the ideal man and, of course, the ideal woman. We know something of the ideal man — the artist, the thinker, the statesman…but what was this ideal woman?

Stunningly, the "ideal woman" of the Renaissance was, by many measures, less free, less independent and had less access to the economic and legal systems of her time than her predecessor. "Urbanization," according to Maria Marcotti (*Italian Women Writers from the Renaissance to the Present*, 2010), "and the codification of procedures regulating commerce, trade and all kinds of market relations restricted the activities of women in ways unknown in previous centuries."

Further, accumulating evidence strongly suggests that the Renaissance women were deliberately and systematically excluded from the arts. Artistic creation in genres and trades that were primarily the provenance of women was purposefully devalued and demoted to a position of lower status.

There was no great Renaissance for women. We just aren't aware of it — and partially, that's because the Middle Ages get a bad rap.

Just as the Renaissance conjures up gilt frames and elegant music, the medieval period seems to prompt lurid tales of witch hunts, short brutish lives filled with superstition, silly

beliefs in magic and constant oppression. Perhaps the most commonly accepted narrative in the public consciousness is that the Middle Ages were a miserable time for women, while the Renaissance allowed for greater freedom, protection and participation in society.

That, as it turns out, is not — precisely — correct. Certainly, there is no denying the dominance of the patriarchal society, women's lack of access to political and social power or the perception of lowered spiritual and social status, particularly *vis-à-vis* Church doctrine, in medieval society. At the same time, however, there was often a certain amount of equality in economic status, particularly in access to both artisan trades and the general workforce.

It's difficult to make broad statements about social conditions in Europe over any significant period of time as conditions between different cultures were often highly disparate, with great variance even within the same regions. According to Paul Kristeller (*Renaissance Thought and Its Sources*, 1979), "a single medieval tradition does not exist; rather, there are many different medieval traditions, some of them quite opposed to others." Still, with that said, there is evidence of more resources and recourse for women than generally imagined, with an expansion of legal rights particularly towards late Middle Ages. For instance, in some areas of Europe, the common women could represent themselves in court without having a male to escort, protect or intercede for her. A woman who was assaulted, maligned or cheated in business could address the court themselves and often, gain redress for the slight.

Soon thereafter, though, that began to change…and not necessarily for the better.

Examination of legal and government records from various sources (specifically, the Italian city-states) indicates significant changes in female agency, protection and individuality.

According to Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., in *Women in the Streets: Essays on Sex and Power in Renaissance Italy* (1996), "Women's appearances in the criminal tribunals and their actions reported in these records chronical the deterioration in women's status and power (and especially of laboring women) over the course of the Renaissance."

Further examination of court records indicates a decline in the prosecution of violent crimes against women, resulting in a significant surge in assault and battery-related murders — as much as 300% between the 14th and 15th centuries in Florence. Cohn notes, "…as with modern ghettos today, law-enforcing agencies and the tribunals of the mid-*Quattrocento*[1400s], reflecting their more centralized and elitist character in Medicean Florence, simply ceased to bother with many of the normal, run-of-the-mill assaults and battery cases involving women from the artisan and laboring families."

More relevant to this discussion is that this decrease of freedom also had an effect on other aspects of women's lives, severely curtailing their opportunities for involvement in the arts. The review of criminal statistics, Cohn says, "suggest that women in the mid-*Quattrocento* were less inclined and less able to circulate as freely in the streets of Florence, meeting other women and even other men outside the home as they had in the late *Trecento*."

He further notes that current research on statistics and data related to non-elite women of the era finds that there was a "sharp decline" in women's participation both in public life and the workforce — which included the artisan class. One historian, looking at the records of one religious confraternity (religious, lay-run charitable organizations) in Florence, found that in the mid-to-late-Trecento, that 38% (136 individuals) of its membership were female artisans; by the mid-*Quattrocentro*, there were only *four*.

In less than one hundred years, a slow-but-expanding system of protection and participation in society, employment and access to artisan trades for women all but eroded away, leaving many questions — not the least of which is, simply, *why*?

"Traditional" Values: As Offensive Then as They Are Now

Nothing happens in a vacuum; there is always one — or usually, many — precipitating factors for social change. The impetus for this gradual loss of personal freedom for women had to come from somewhere, and the roots of it seem to have grown from the very movement that influenced the creation of a new, perfected society, and made the golden age of patronage possible — Humanism.

Renaissance humanism is not, it should be noted, the 20th century perception of humanism (secular concern with human values), which Kristeller warns has little to do with the Renaissance at all. "Renaissance Humanism," he continues, "was […] a cultural and educational program which emphasized and developed an important but limited area of studies." This revival of study focused on classical literature, of Greek and Roman rhetoric, and the philosophical, social and even to an extent, economic ideas of the Renaissance grew of this study, with classical antiquity forming the model for society and cultural activity.

This resurgence of Classical philosophy and renewed admiration for Greek and Roman culture — both notoriously patriarchal and even anti-female in many ways — is indisputably one of those precipitating factors for the restrictive changes to female status. Though the Church had long held that women were the source of original sin, the revival of interest in Classical literature offered new opportunities to confirm and enforce the perceived inherent intellectual, physical and moral inferiority of the female sex. (See Jerry C. Nash in *Renaissance Quarterly, "Renaissance Misogyny, Biblical Feminism and Helisenne de*

Crenne's Epistres familieres et invectives," 1997)

One period author, Gratien du Pont, wrote in his *Controverses des sexes masculine et femenin*, that "woman is evil by nature and prone to vice," and that the "most wicked" man is "of higher value in the eyes of his Creator [...] than the 'holiest women'," (Nash, 1997). Du Pont included a list of references in support of his "research," beginning with the old testament and continuing on through antiquity to modern (Renaissance) times. Du Pont's vitriol isn't the work of a single outlier. It is merely one example of the intellectual position on female inferiority and their appropriate place in society. Even Martin Luther, that 'great reformer,' had this to say on the subject:

God has created man with a broad chest, not broad hips, so that in that part of him he can be wise; but that part out of which filth comes is small. In a woman, this is reversed. That is why she had much filth and little wisdom.

(The constraints of this article do not allow the time and space to include even a representative sample of the anti-female literature of the period. Nash's partial list of Du Pont's pejorative terms alone runs on for several paragraphs and includes amazing gems like '*grande tromperesse*' — which, as far as I am able to discern, is probably similar to 'strumpet' in English, but literally translates to "great" or "large trumpetess." Taken in context, I presume the term refers to a loud, inappropriate woman, but even without a complete understanding of what it even means, I *definitely* want to be one.)

As depressing and demoralizing as it might've been to be given such a lowered spiritual status, that particular viewpoint had more than just religious implications for women in general, and female artists, specifically. The devaluation of female moral capacity made her more than simply unsuitable for a place in the arts, her presence tainted the purity of art, itself. Rejecting a suggestion by Plutarch that the work of the ideal woman (the "*virtuosa*," in Renaissance terms) should be exhibited along

with examples of art by ideal men of the era (the "*virtuoso*"), one author, Paolo Pino, wrote in 1541: "It displeases me to hear the woman compared to the excellence of the man in virtuosity, and it seems to me that art is denigrated by doing so."

Further, by entering this realm of masculine privilege and excellence, the female artist loses what little social status she might have had. Pino continues on, saying that these women artists remind him of "tales told about hermaphrodites" (Fredrika Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtusoa*, 1997). Jacobs, commenting on Pino's writings, notes that Pino's "choice of analogy is insightful. Not only does it define painting as a masculine vocation, it defines the woman painter as not quite male, not quite female," something that puts the female artist in an uncomfortable and unpopular position in society.

Still, much of this criticism comes from the scholars, the practitioners of Humanism, rather than the ruling class, so the question will no doubt be asked, how much influence could it have had on public policy and social change? The answer, not surprisingly, is a lot. Though the intellectual class itself did not necessarily hold political power, it nevertheless provided the new paradigm for those in power. According to Alfred von Martin (*Sociology of the Renaissance*, 1944), "the intellectual leading group supports the power position of the ruling class by provision of an ideology and by guiding public opinion in the requisite direction."

That ideology defined the ideal woman as one who remained at home, who acknowledged her inferiority and moral deficit, who knew her place in the system as the property of first her father, then her husband, and who, of course, was educated properly (i.e., with a heavy emphasis on obedience). One example is *De Institutione Feminae Christianae*, written by Juan Luis Vives for in 1522 for Henry VIII's daughter, the future Queen Mary I of England. Vives didn't beat about the bush with his recommendations for Mary's education. Aside from

obedience, he clearly outlined the primary concern of female education: "…[H]er studies should be in those works which shape morals and virtue; the studies of wisdom which teach the best and most holy manner of life. […] **chastity is a woman's particular concern; when she is clearly taught about this, she is sufficiently instructed.**" (Emphasis mine.)

One etiquette and behavioral handbook from France (*Le menagier de Paris*, 1393) suggested that even reading a letter (other than from the woman's husband or father) was potentially an unchaste act. If reading a note is destructive to a woman's virtue, one wonders what lascivious effect harpsichord or drawing lessons might have. (Once again, I felt immediately tempted to try this for myself, then remembered I'd already *done* all these things.)

The only role that art had for a woman in this new ideology was that of instruction: reminding her of her sinful nature and teaching her obedience and acquiescence to her place in the 'natural order' — another concept Humanists borrowed from the Classical era and embraced whole-heartedly. Margaret L. King, author of *Women of the Renaissance*(1991), points out that what Renaissance society felt about women who broke from the natural order can be understood from the placard placed on the stake to which Jeanne d'Arc (perhaps the most famous woman to defy the 'natural order') was bound and burned. It read: *heretic, liar, sorceress*.

The system, created as it was for the *virtuoso*, had no room for anyone else, and if one only looks at that narrative, one will find few women, artists or otherwise, in the records. As bleak as this sounds — and there's no getting around it, it was bleak — will always finds a way. If one looks a little deeper, cutting through the ideology and the historical accounts, which, as we know, are written by the victors, something amazing begins to emerge.

Despite the oppressive conditions and restrictions (which somehow managed to grow worse in many ways as the Renaissance progressed), women found ways to work around these strictures and even, in some cases, create their own system. Once one moves past the traditional narrative, there is a rich history of female patrons and artists whose contributions to art and society are woefully unknown and unacknowledged — and in the next two sections, we'll take a look at who these women were and how they managed to work around (or in many cases, simply subvert) the system to achieve their goals.

ART, GENDER, AND THE RENAISSANCE:
WHERE MY MATRONS AT?
PART 2: TAKE ME TO CHURCH

– Felicity Graham –

Matronage, Patronage… What's in a Name?

Words have power. The words we use change how we think, perceive and interpret. Words inforce or challenge the status quo. Words change the questions we ask, or whether we even ask questions at all.

Words like patronage.

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In an era marked by its overt approach to imagery, relatively few class, social or gender boundaries, and particularly in a culture that (mostly) speaks a neuter-gender language, the subtle influence of gendered words is often lost or overlooked. It is difficult for the modern-day reader to fully appreciate the wealth of subtle meaning in the choice of words used in Medieval or Renaissance writing and rhetoric. The closest example the average American might understand is the use of coded language, words like "welfare queen," or "forty-seven percenters" — terms that imply a great deal about both the speaker and the subject.

Renaissance writers, particularly in the regions where Italian was the primary language, took the gendered roots of words quite seriously, and in turn, used them to underscore the new social paradigm. *Virtuoso*, that perfect specimen, is a perfect example. Its first root is obvious — virtù or virtue, which came to mean both moral and artistic excellence throughout the period, the two being intrinsically linked. Its second, and older, root goes

further back, to the antiquity that the Humanists so adored: vir, the Latin word for man. Anything good, the thinking went, had to be masculine in nature. The arguments over whether women could, therefore, be virtuous went about as well as one might expect. (*Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa*, 1997)

A similar issue presents itself when we discuss Renaissance arts and patronage. *Patron* itself is derived from *pater* (father) in Latin, and like virtuoso, took on a whole host of symbolic meanings. The many traits associated with a *patron* is long: protector, father, defender, a lord or master or leader and "one who advances a cause." A patron wasn't, as we think of it now, simply someone who commissioned art; it was a position of leadership and protection and guidance. By that definition, not only were women of the Renaissance inherently incapable of being patrons, but records and texts from the period would only acknowledge the existence of individuals who met that very specific understanding of the word.

That viewpoint seems to have endured, for until the late 1970's, there was no scholarship on the myriad of roles women played as patrons. Further, as scholarship on previously-neglected female artists and patronage *has*progressed, researchers have primarily used an "additive" approach — attempting to place women and their contributions within that male-oriented patronage structure. And at first glance, that doesn't seem unreasonable, and challenging it has raised accusations of oversensitivity or being "politically correct."

Yet, when we consider the additive approach with an understanding of the original definition of the word, problems immediately become apparent. Through that lens, the extent of female patronage *is* limited to the few "magnificent exceptions," like Isabella d'Este, Marie de Medici and a handful of other high-ranking women with enough financial and political power to force their way into a boys-only club. "[B]ringing women into the existing disciplinary structures of art history," historian

Roger Crum contends, "[does] little to question the nature of those structures," (*Beyond Isabella: Secular Women Patrons of Art in Renaissance Italy*, 2001, ed. David Wilkins) and without that kind of examination, history will always reflect the victors' side of the story.

Previously in this series 'matronage' has and will continue to be used to refer to female patrons, and an explanation is perhaps in order. The word itself — matronage is not new; it's been around since the mid-1700s, though not necessarily used in the context of art, and it means precisely the opposite of patronage. It reflects the type of care and leadership that a *woman*, in her social role and experience, can provide. It may seem awkward or unnecessary, but I believe that it challenges us not only to ask new questions, but also, as David Wilkins (*Beyond Isabella*, 2001) suggests, to ask the *right* questions: Who were these women? What classes did they belong to? How did they finance their commissions? What were their motivations? Was their patronage different from that of men? And, perhaps most importantly, *how* did they make it happen in such a restrictive society?

Drawing the Negative Space

When historians began to question whether matronage might be more than the few magnificent exceptions, the first hurdle to be overcome was the issue of documentation…or rather, the lack thereof. In a patriarchal society, where women had little financial autonomy and illiteracy was high, the paper trail would necessarily only reflect one side of the story. To get a better picture of women's involvement in the process, scholars would have to create an image from the negative space — both what the records say and don't say, as well as other sources of data.

According to Roger Krum (*Beyond Isabella*, 2001), [w]omen in the Renaissance may often have initiated the patronage process,

but their financial position and society's dictates for their roles may have prohibited them from drafting and signing relevant documentation." In his own work, Krum questions whether the documentation that *has* survived even gives an adequate understanding of what happened, saying,

"Many would agree, that when a document of commission surfaces, the matter of patronage is satisfactorily solved. Linked by a document, one patron, one artist and one work of constitute an indivisible whole, a trinity of sorts, that comfortably defines the parameters of patronage.

This, though, he continues, "points directly to the limitations of documents and to the problems of relying upon a single source for historical reconstructions." As an example, he gives his own parents. If, five hundred years hence, someone were to discover his father's checkbook, it would seem as though he was responsible for all the domestic purchases — house remodeling, furniture, carpet and drapes, art, china and all the other artisan goods and services that go into creating and maintaining a lifestyle according to the standards and dictates of his parents' social status. That is the picture as drawn by the financial documents.

Anyone reading this, however, will understand immediately that that is an incorrect assessment of the situation. At the very least, the woman of the house will have some say in the selection, not to mention the placement and usage, of the items. In fact, Krum states that his mother "chose the house and everything in it, and her will is supreme — if not exclusive — when renovations are made, a chair recovered or a painting selected for purchase or removal." His father, then, is "far from being a twenty-first-century patron; he just pays the bills. Patronage for [his] parents is a process, not a solitary act."

Mr. Krum's description of his parents' situation is reflected in my own relationship as well as those of my friends and

acquaintances. The process of purchasing goods, whether bespoke or mass-produced, is a joint process, in varying degrees and levels. This was not a recent change in the social dynamic, either. Writings from the period placed great emphasis on a wife's duty to care for the material aspects of the family — knowing how to take care of items, have an understanding of their valuation (as part of their assets), and their appropriate display and use. Determining who is behind act of 'patronage' is more than simply asking, "Who paid for it?"

One area that has provided a great deal of insight is the artists' own records. According to Rosi Gilday, (*Beyond Isabella: Secular Women Patrons of Art in Renaissance Italy*, 2001), records from one artist, Neri di Bicci, show that he received commissions from at least twenty-four women, most of whom "sponsored paintings jointly with a *mundualdus* — a court-appointed male guardian who help a woman conduct legal transactions."

Further, the women making these commissions knew the artistic tastes and standards of the day, and had very clear ideas of what they wanted. Artists' records show that many commissions involved a great deal of artistic input from the matron, according to her personal taste and the purpose for the commission — art for the home would have very different properties than a memorial for a chapel, for example. One contract, in particular, has very clear prescriptions for the artist about the images she wanted on the altar panel she was commissioning, up to and including the appropriate iconographic and symbolism to be used. (*Beyond Isabella*, 2001)

Another example of drawing from the negative space comes from the art itself. For instance, outside of portraits and historic or biblical scenes, artistic standards dictated that women were not included in paintings as it violated Humanist-influenced principles of 'virtuous' art. Artists worked to the contemporary taste, of course, but they also understood where their bread was buttered and worked to include symbolism or other insertions

that were meant to flatter or please the patron. Therefore, anonymous commissions of paintings that featured females predominantly in the imagery were most likely diplomatic attempts to flatter or please the patron…or more likely, the matron.

The Class Divide: How the Other Half Gives

The discussion of patronage, male or female, has traditionally focused on the nobility — the most visible element of Renaissance society, where there is an excess of records available to study. A closer examination, however, finds that patronage or matronage of any sort happened on a variety of levels, something that's often left out of the common narrative.

Matronage, even more so than patronage, was influenced by class and social status. If one were to ask, "what does matronage look like," the answer will always be, "it depends." It depends on whether the matron was a noble or from the merchant class, whether she was married or widowed, whether she was in the secular or sacred spheres, whether or not she had financial or social autonomy, and lastly — but definitely not least — her *goals*.

Matronage in the Ruling Class

Matronage at the highest levels was often a form of political maneuvering. The reductions of freedom that women experienced in the Renaissance were not taken silently and there were protests from the lowest to highest levels. Women demanded representation, an "equal interest with men," and reverses of the loss of access they'd had to trade. As women pushed for leadership opportunities, men pushed back with detractions, equating women's attempts to speak in public as representing the drive of their wicked sexual desires, and doubling down on the idea of women's innate lack of leadership potential.

Patronage, then, that most manly, fatherly act of protection and leadership, became one of the tools female leaders used, both to create a narrative about themselves and their reign, but also to assert their power, control their legacy and reward supporters — a trend that continued in later eras, even when female leadership was more common. By commissioning pious art, particularly that of female saints and the Virgin Mary, they demonstrated their devotion and symbolically linked themselves to holy women, both to subtly underscore their legitimacy and reassure a disturbed male populace of their chastity and purity.

The most recognizable example of this is, of course, Elizabeth I of England, who labeled herself the virgin queen (pre-empting accusations of immorality), and commissioned "verbal and painted representations of herself to construct a persona that was both authoritative and nonthreatening to a culture that found powerful women to be disturbing and unnatural." (*Women's Roles in the Renaissance*, 2005)

"For the female leader of this period," Alice Sanger (*Art, Gender and Religious Devotion in Grand Ducal Tuscancy*, 2014) writes, "the balance of power and piety had to be carefully managed and even the most devout female regents were subject to criticism," something that Maria Maddalena of Austria, wife of Cosimo II, understood quite well. She used lavish patronage to manipulate her public image and create a legacy — both during her marriage and after Cosimo's death, when she and her mother-in-law became joint regents of Tuscany. Her approach combined both sacred and secular art from all the disciplines — painting, sculpture, architecture, theatre, music and poetry, even funding public festivals that underscored both her piety and legitimacy. (As a side note of interest, her court poet, Ottavio Rinuccuni, was the first author of opera *libretti*, an art form in and unto itself.)

Fina Buzzacarini, the wife and consort of Franscesco de Carrara, the ruler of the city-state of Padua, purposefully built her own

fortune, a collection of estates producing a significant income — with the full knowledge, support and gifts (of money and other properties) from her husband — to become the wealthiest woman in Padua at the time. With her resources, she began a program of "gendered patronage," (*Beyond Isabella*, 2005), creating a *camera dominarum* — a women-only space for her daughters, female servants and young women from the elite circles, educating them on the ways of power and giving her daughters large, legally protected dowries with which to enact that power. Her largesse extended to those of the lower classes who supported and worked for her.

Her greatest act of 'matronage' was the remaking of the Padua Baptistery (attached to the Padua Cathedral) as a future mausoleum for her and her husband, an act that would leave an indelible stamp on the city over which the couple held sway — a process that took political power, a great deal of money, her very specific details as to the art she wanted (which uncharacteristically celebrated a preponderance of female saints and matriarchs) and a well-known fresco artist. Her final stamp on the project, a way of stating to the world that she was the dominant actor in the process, was to dictate that her tomb would be placed over the main entrance, situated amongst symbolic art. "The whole Marian context for the tomb emphasizes the role of bride and mother, and thus Fina's own status as consort and genetrix of the Carrera dynasty." (*Beyond Isabella*, 2001) Her message to subsequent generations was clear: *this is* **my** *work*.

Patronage in the Lower Nobility & Merchant Classes

Secular Matronage

Though women at the highest levels of the nobility have received the most attention and commissioned larger-scale works, the majority of female patronage seems to have come from lower social circles — smaller commissions but in greater volume.

In the Italian city-states particularly, the Renaissance was a time of great financial growth, and the emphasis on investing wealth on material objects created a large demand for artisanal work. Wealth, honor and stability — even in the merchant classes — was symbolized by the acquisition of art and other precious items, and indubitably, wives were deeply involved in that process. (For more on the Renaissance economy and the philosophy of an "empire of things," see Richard Goldthwaite's *The Economy of Renaissance Florence*, 2008.)

There were guides for the appropriate types of commissions women should make — things that would remind women of their sinful natures and the need for devotion and piety. One such, written by Cardinal Giovanni Dominici in 1446, depicts patronage as an aid to salvation, suggesting that wives should only commission religious *objet d'art* for churches and works for the home that would instruct and education their children in moral behavior. Compliance with these recommendations, not surprisingly, seems spotty at best.

Matronage that revolved around the family, their home and its stewardship probably made up the bulk of female commissions. However, the assumption that Renaissance women wouldn't have had the means or autonomy to work large scale has, according to Carolyn Valone (*Beyond Isabella*, 2001), falsely led people to assume that women were unable to commission larger projects — particularly in architecture. She suggests that the commissioning of civic and religious buildings in the public realm was, in fact, one of the ways women gave themselves a "public voice," and has found evidence of at least fifty architectural commissions in early-modern Italy — and more will no doubt emerge as research progresses.

Other evidence suggests that in some cases, wives may have even been involved in commissions on a professional level for their husbands. One example is of Eleonora di Toledo, who may have been deeply involved in the process of commissioning portraits

intended to be diplomatic gifts. (*Beyond Isabella*, 2005)

According to Catherine King (*Renaissance Women Patrons: Wives and Widows in Italy,*1998), widows were more likely to initiate commissions than wives, in part due to their greater independence. Representing almost a quarter of the female population in Florence in the *Quattrocento*, older widows had a unique position that sometimes allowed them greater access to the arts than their married sisters. How much access depended on the city; some areas had laws requiring widows to act in all legal and financial matters through a male proxy.

Widows were expected to build burial chapels or commission memorial artwork for their deceased partner and to follow through on any directions for patronage he might have left. Some simply ignored their husband's request, however. Ms. Valone (*Beyond Isabella*, 2005) notes one particular example in Vittoria della Tolfa, who took the significant chunk of funds her husband had set aside for a family chapel — using it to found a nunnery instead. In *her* will, she left funds for a much more modest memorial for them both.

As with Vittoria's nunnery, a great deal of matronage practiced by women at all social levels was specifically meant to benefit other women: founding or supporting hospitals, nunneries or schools that provided education for women — even creating and maintaining financial legacies meant to provide support to other women, often their daughters or other female family members.

Sacred Matronage

Despite the personal asceticism in monastic communities, convents still required artisan services: sacred artwork for the chapels and perhaps even for the cloister as an inspiration for devotion, accessories of worship (chalices, altars, tapestries, crucifixes) and instruments or musical compositions for

services. Records show that nuns' matronage for these kinds of commissions was often a group effort — banding together to choose the items and artists, perhaps reaching out to their families for assistance or funding.

Funding also came in the form of bequests from other women on occasion, leaving sometimes substantial amounts for the artistic development of the convent and its chapel. In other cases, widows would commission specific pieces of art *for* convent chapels — or perhaps even providing funding for the commissioning of a new funerary chapel art in the convent for her own memorial or legacy.

One category of women for whom precise documentation *does* exist are the *sante vive* — living saints. These were technically laywomen, not cloistered nuns, who were exceptionally devout and recognized as such. Though few in number, these women were able make "commissions of unusual prominence using their own wealth or the gifts of men who believed in their sanctity." (King, 1998) Additionally, because of their reputation and social position, their female relatives were able to make larger or unusual commissions that wouldn't normally have been open to them.

One example of a *sante vive* commission was the creation of a new chapel. The woman in question, beata Elena Dugliogi of Bologna, was — with the help of a papal legate — able to hire the services of Raphael for the paintings and finish the project in with astonishing speed. Because of her possible proximity to sainthood, she had clerics clamoring to be one of the ones "who knew her when," which meant that not only was the chapel completed in record time, she was also able to acquire a relic of St. Cecilia for the altar.

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Sacred or secular, the theme that emerges from each of these

narratives is one of women finding ways to give themselves some form of visibility and presence in the public sphere that was otherwise denied to them. Through matronage, they managed to shape the world around them, empower themselves, help other women and create legacies for themselves and their families. 'Good' art is subjective, but truly *great* art changes lives — and considering its impact on a disadvantaged class, the legacy of Renaissance matronage may have produced the greatest art of all.

ART GENDER, AND THE RENAISSANCE: WHERE MY MATRONS AT? PART 3: LOSING MY RELIGION

– Felicity Graham –

Separate But (Not) Equal

"It depends upon what the meaning of the word 'is' is."

President Clinton's famous (or infamous, depending on which side of the aisle you sit) splitting of hairs has gone down in the annals of political history as an example of nitpicking at its finest, speaking a truth that was not, perhaps, precisely honest. It raises a good point, though: What does art actually mean? When we're talking about female artists in the Renaissance, we must re-examine the definition of art as it was defined then, rather than taking for granted that we instinctively know and understand what it encompasses.

Just as victors write the history and choose what's worthy of recording, so too do they define the terms of the playing field. During the Renaissance, a hierarchy of art was created that still exists today, surprisingly intact, as a direct product of Humanist thought and values. This process, referred to as "canonization" by Meg Brown and Kari McBridge in *Women's Roles in the Renaissance* (2005), is defined as the "social, economic and cultural forces that decide what kind of art with be designated 'great' and will therefore be preserved and studied."

A modern example can be seen in fiction genres: 'literary' fiction sits at the top of a totem pole, from which position it looks down and sneers at 'genre' fiction, with romance and 'chick lit' — both seen as solely the purvey of women — at the very bottom. That any genre intended for women is considered lesser is merely the Renaissance hierarchy of artistic purity

interpreted for our modern age.

The same goes for music: classical music, intellectual jazz and *avant garde* experimental music all sit in the highest places of purity, while 'genre' music — anything meant for the masses, or a product of a minority group, like rap or R&B, receives the highest criticism. Even jazz, a product derived from many black American musical traditions, is only worthy if it's purified by either white performers and composers or deconstructed according to the current intellectual trends.

Even what types of creation are allowed to be 'art' stem from concerted efforts during the Renaissance to define who could be artists. What we think of as the 'fine arts' vs. 'crafts' (with a significant value judgment between the two) was a deliberate filtering process. Fine arts just 'happened' to be fields dominated by men, while the craft label was applied to fields that were produced overwhelmingly by women. A prime example of this can be seen in textile work — weaving, embroidery, lace-making, knitting and needlework of all types, all female-centric trades.

Prior to the Renaissance, needlework, particularly embroidery, was considered a fine art, commanding similar fees as paintings — with English embroidery towering in reputation above all others. The Bayeux tapestry, a visual narrative of the Norman conquest, is one such example of their output. Though its authorship is not fully known, current scholarship suggests that it was the creation of one particular group of needle workers, all female. Even a cursory examination of the piece reveals its quality; there is no question that it is indeed both art and fine.

As the Renaissance progressed, however, those fields were reduced to 'crafts' and the women who worked in them devalued both artistically and financially. According to Merry Wesner, author of *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (2000), in the Renaissance, "[middle]- and upper-class girls

were taught to embroider because embroidered clothing and household objects became signs of class status, and because embroidery was seen as the best way to inculcate the traits most admired in a woman — passivity, chastity, attention to detail, domesticity. As more embroidery was produced in the home for domestic consumption, it was increasingly considered an 'accomplishment' rather than art and those who embroidered for pay received lower wages, except for male designers of embroidery patterns and the few men employed as court embroiderers by Europe's monarchs."

Just as with patronage, it becomes necessary to ask not whether there were female artists within the male framework of "art," but rather, what did female artists and artistry look like? Leaving aside the "Magnificent Exceptions," the women who had the resources or connections to work within the male-dominated sphere, who was the average female artist, what was her path to artistry and how — if at all — was she affected by patronage?

Sexuality as Currency

In a society where men held all of the financial, political, social power and privilege — the currencies both male artists and patrons used to acquire their respective places in society, there seems to be little left for women negotiate a position for themselves in the artistic world. Two primary resources are the primary currencies at their disposal: their proximity to and relationships with powerful men and their sexuality, even conscribed as it was. The most famous matrons, the names we know, leveraged the first. The majority of female artists, however, had to rely on the second.

For the female painter or sculptor, that might have meant giving up their social position to become that "in-between" of which Paolo Pino described as reminding him of "the stories of hermaphrodites." (See the previous section, *Mrs. Cellophane*, for more on this.) In practical terms, this would most likely

mean losing opportunities for marriage and hence, financial and social protection, or access and participation in the social sphere. For performing artists, it often meant trading sexual favors for protection or access. Any women's public display of art, regardless of the genre, led to questions about her morality — particularly the case for female actors during the Renaissance. Abusive and discriminatory environments often meant that a female performer required protection, both politically and financially. For all but a lucky few, this meant having an affair, receiving all the judgment and loss of status incumbent with that position.

Female access to art in the convent environment is often pointed to as an example of a case where a woman didn't need to trade her sexuality for access. In my estimation, the reality is the exact opposite of that position. To join a convent, a woman had to relinquish her body and her sexuality — access and ownership, both — to the custody of the male-run church. As chaste 'brides of Christ,' their access to the arts was paid for with their sexuality, in some ways far more dramatically than the woman having an affair with a patron.

The knife-edge of sexual currency cut in multiple directions, too. Jonathan Hart, in *Reading the Renaissance* (2014), notes that the 'explicitly economic link between artist and patron whereby the artist's production is exchanged for economic support made [any] woman whose patron was male vulnerable to accusations of prostitution."

There is no small amount of irony in the fact that women of the Renaissance were required to trade on their sexuality, while simultaneously being chastised for any hint of lasciviousness or chastity. If that seems like a no-win situation…well, that's because it is. And it was *meant* to be. Even some enlightened minds of the period recognized the self-serving nature of anti-female criticism. As one author, Robert Burdet (a.k.a Robert Vaughn), writes in the dedication of his poetic *Dyalogue*

Defensyve for Women against Malycyous Detractours in 1542, this double moral standard comes about "…through avarice, the insatiable sin / detractors swarm, as bees about a hive / when wicked defamation is profitable to them."

Female Artists and Artistry

It would take far more time and space than this series permits to even attempt a partial examination of the spectrum of female art in the Renaissance. The following examples are intended to give a sense of the environment and opportunities women artists had, as well as give a sense of the stark difference between the male and female spheres.

Literary Arts

Any discussion of female authorship during the Renaissance must first acknowledge that the opposition to female literacy resulted on an environment wherein only women of means or unusual circumstance would have the levels of education and access necessary both to write *and* be published.

One such example is Marie Dentière. She entered a convent, where she must have been shown exceptional potential, for she became abbess in her early twenties. Electrified by Martin Luther's denunciation of monasticism, she left the convent at great risk to her own person and fled to Strasbourg, where she eventually married Antoine Froment, a well-known voice in the Protestant reformation movement. She herself became an ardent supporter of the reformation and wrote as an advocate for the advancement of women in theology and church roles.

Not surprisingly, this didn't win her much support from leaders of the Reformation — men like John Calvin and Martin Luther himself. Dentière published her next work (*The War for and Deliverance of Geneva*) as "a merchant living in that city," and it immediately attracted criticism. Her second work,

Epistre tres utile (A Useful Letter), addressed to Marguerite of Navarre, was published…and almost immediately suppressed — most of the copies seized and burned. Though she was an exceedingly vigorous voice in the Reform debate, her works were actively discounted and destroyed. According to Thomas Head, only fragments about her life and work survive, and it wasn't till modern times that her own publications were actually attributed to her. (*Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation*, 1987)

She did make a lasting impression, however. After the fiery public and clerical response to her Epistre, Geneva passed laws forbidding the publication of any female writer that lasted until the 17th century.

One of the primary areas of female authorship that evolved during the Renaissance was, again not surprisingly, the defense of women against the tirades against female virtue and value. Perhaps the premiere example of this genre is the spirited rebuttal Heliésenne de Crenne offered in response to the vitriol of Gratien du Pont, he of the '*grande tromperesse*." When, in her *Epistres familieres et invectives* (1539), the male accuser complains, "How dangerous are your physical allurements, the source of so much grief!" her female defender wryly responds, "I can assure you it holds no danger for any man of integrity." (I believe the appropriate contemporary response is, *oh snap*!)

Much of the existing work by female authors of the period is either religious in nature (one of the few arenas in which women did have a great deal of freedom to write), written for personal use or unofficially for the men around them, rather than commissioned work for a patron. One significant — and genuinely magnificent — exception is the work of Christine Pizan, the author of a *Le Livre de la Cité des dames* (1404), a defense (and promotion) of rigorous education for women. Pizan drew, according to *Encyclopedia of Women in the Renaissance* (2007), an "outpouring of female patronage

unprecedented in literary history."

Pizan was an outlier, however. According to Jonathan Hart (*Reading the Renaissance*, 2014), it was simply more acceptable for a woman to act as a patron for male authors, than for female writers to have patrons. One way women found around this, at least in Italy during the latter part of the Renaissance, was to simply become a courtesan, trading sexuality for literary recognition. This was, he suggests, perhaps the most effective form of patronage a female author could have at the time, for in this manner, she could have multiple patrons and since her fame reflected directly on her paramours, the men would go to great lengths to enhance her reputation.

Of all the literary genres, poetry seems to have been a more socially acceptable form of expression, for much more of it has survived and there are records of the writers receiving notice and praise — just not commissions. Gaspara Stampa is perhaps the most well-known poet of the era — recognized in her own time for her complex, sensual work and her daring, openly stated ambition. "Wherever valor is esteemed and prized," she wrote, "I hope to find glory among the well-born: glory and not only pardon." Not just among men, though: "I hope," she continues, "some woman will be moved to say: 'Most happy she, who suffered famously for such a famous cause'!"

Despite her considerable achievement and the fact that she moved in the highest literary circles, rubbing shoulders with most famous patrons of her era, there seems to be no record of her ever having received a commission. The very first publication of her work came, in fact, after her death. She did what she set out to do: she has found glory rather than pardon. That it took nearly five-hundred years for her recognition to come is heartbreaking.

Performing Arts

The social strictures around female participation in music during the Renaissance were such that outside of a small handful of exceptions, most opportunities came either in or around the convent. In the secular world, there were few public performers; composers, fewer still. Much of the difficulty, as we've seen over and over again, lay in access to education. Most secular female musicians were trained by male relatives or friends.

This was the case with Barbara Strozzi and Francesca Caccini, both composers and performers from the tail end of the Renaissance who received court exposure and patronage and probably the best known of all the female musicians from the period. Caccini went on to found a school for singers, and it was her virtuosity and the public fascination thereof, according to Diane Jezic in *Women Composers, The Lost Tradition Found* (1994), that opened the door to Court positions for other female singers.

In contrast to the lack of secular training, convents were — at first — the best place for women who wished to be composers or performers (singing or instrumental). In Italy, convents created choirs for orphanage girls, "training them so," according to Brown & McBride, "that the city government in Venice [...] sponsored and even made revenue from their performances. Over time, the reputations of these schools grew to the point that non-orphaned girls were taken as day students. These particular young women weren't required to join the convent, but in return for the education, they were required to sing or play for the organization for ten years after the end of their training (usually around the age of thirty, meaning that they often still sacrificed the opportunity to marry or have children). The city of Venice made significant revenue off of the performances, and as their renown grew, often sent the most talented to study with well-known teachers.

This shining spot of opportunity came to an end in 1563,

however, when the Council of Trent severely curtailed the types and frequency of convent performances. Nuns were forbidden to play anything other than the organ, leaving fewer and fewer opportunities for young women to learn. The final nail in the coffin of music education came in 1686, when papal injunction forbade any woman from learning music from any man, including relatives. As per Brown & McBride (*Women's Roles in the Renaissance*, 2005),

The explanation that Pope Innocent XI gave for prohibiting even daughters to study with their fathers specifically linked music with immorality, "music is completely injurious to the modesty that is problem for the [female] sex."

Despite that prohibition, secular music opportunities for women began to appear towards the end of the Renaissance, though it wasn't until the 18th century that female composers and performers begin to truly enter the public sphere. The response to the entrance of women into the field is, perhaps by this point, predictable. As with needlepoint, female participation in music was cultivated as "accomplishments, rather than serious skills, and women's performances were typically private occasions confined to a family audience."

Theater offered more freedom for women, in certain areas of Europe — though it often came at a heavy price. The amount of abuse to which women were subjected often meant that female performers often became the mistresses of patrons or other influential men. Abuse came from without as well as within, however, and actresses were labeled as immoral and unnatural women. Still, the theater offered opportunities for literate women, occasionally as directors as well as actresses, though the necessity of literacy meant that it was primarily an opportunity taken by middle-class women in search of some kind of financial security of their own. Many performers,

according to Brown & McBride, may have been women whose otherwise 'good' families had come into straightened circumstances.

Visual Arts

As with the performing arts, most women received their training from male relatives or similar learned and practiced on their own. Propriety forbade that women study the nude forms, particularly in relation to male anatomy. That lack was notable and obvious to the point that it was remarked on by many contemporaries. Vasari, as noted before, commented on how *suor* Plautilla's lack of exposure to the male form meant that her male-centric art — the types of painting that were desired and received commissions — was far less impressive than that of female figures.

Another male artist, acknowledging the deficiency and attempting to find a way around it for female artists, wrote, "It is against propriety for [women] to draw from the nude. The best advice one can give them is to choose only the best examples to copy." Critics of the period understood and recognized the challenges this presented and, according to Jacobs, "with purposeful regularity, […] described women's works with words like 'patience' and 'diligence'." (*Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa*, 1997)

The difficulties posed in creation of the type of artwork (painting or sculpture) that received the highest social valuation (male-centric historic subjects and landscapes, primarily) meant that women often became experts in the other forms of "lower value" art, such as engraving, portraits, miniatures, still life paintings, book illustration or detailing small domestic objects, *e.g.*, figurines, furniture, etc.

Female sculptors often found success in smaller scale works, as well as mediums or subjects that male sculptors rarely used,

as was the case with Luisa Roldtin, the first recorded female sculptor from Spain. Her financial success and artistic renown came from her work with wood and terracotta, particularly in small-scale works. According to Brown & McBride, her "use of polychromy, along with her intimate details from nature, was unprecedented in terra-cotta religious forms, [and] her clay groups were so treasured that they were kept on permanent display with relics and other sacred icons in many churches throughout Spain." Many of her extraordinary pieces can still be seen today.

Though the large-scale works had the most prestige and commanded the highest fees, there is a certain amount of irony that, as Brown & McBride note, "several of the 'inferior' genres to which women were relegated became so popular during the Renaissance that women still-life painters and miniature portraitists were some of the highest-paid and most-celebrated artists among the courts and monied classes of Europe" — something that the dominant narrative has, perhaps not surprisingly, failed to note.

Another point of interest: in contrast to other parts of Europe, where court commissions provided the bulk of monetary support for artists, in the Netherlands, the wealthy merchant middle-class was the biggest consumer of art in the region. In what would be derided in later centuries as "bourgeois taste," the middle-class provided a huge market for the types of small-scale work that women primarily created and an open market — not patronage — drove supply and demand.

In this case, the free-market determined a great deal of demand… and that demand went against the cultural narrative of artistic value. This raises the question that's often an elephant in the room: Does patronage represent the types of art that people genuinely respond to and enjoy and identify with the most, or does it simply support the art tastemakers have determined people *should*like?

Conclusion

This is by no means an exhaustive review of this complex — and sometimes controversial — topic, but my hope is that it will contribute to the continuing dialogue on patronage and commissioning models. When considering any sort of arts funding, I believe we should be asking ourselves probing and perhaps even uncomfortable questions about conditioned bias, acceptance of the dominant narrative, gatekeeping and the issues of equal exposure, education, access and opportunities. It isn't enough to simply *want* to be an equal opportunity arts organization. It takes a concerted, thoughtful effort to recognize and break down the centuries of invisible barriers that are so familiar to us, we don't even realize they exist.

Apropos of opportunity, I would like to thank Benjamin Wachs (Caveat) for the lively debate he and I have shared about patronage, the chance to share my enthusiasm for this topic with a larger audience and the motivation to create my own path of discovery through the history of art patronage. Sometimes, opportunity comes from unexpected sources, and it's been a fantastic reminder to me to remain open to possibilities from directions I've never considered.

Recommended Reading

- *Beyond Isabella: Secular Women Patrons of Art in Renaissance Italy* (ed. David G. Wilkins, 2001)
- *Defining the Renaissance 'Virtuosa': Women Artists and the Language of Art History and Criticism* (Fredrika H. Jacobs, 1997)
- *Echoes of Women's Voices: Music, Art, and Female Patronage in Early Modern Florence*(Kelley Harness, 2006)
- *Invention of the Renaissance Woman: The Challenge of Female Independence in the Literature and Thought of Italy and England*(Pamela J. Benson, 2010)

- *Invisible Women, Forgotten Artists of Florence* (Jane Fortune, 2009)
- *Italian Women Writers from the Renaissance to the Present: Revising the Canon* (ed. Maria Marotti, 2010)
- *Reading the Renaissance* (Jonathan Hart, 2014)
- *Renaissance Women Patrons: Wives and Widows in Italy, c. 1300-1550* (Catherine E. King, 1998)
- *The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and their Work* (Germaine Greer, 1979)
- *Women Composers: The Lost Tradition Found* (Diane Jezic, 1988)
- *Women in Italian Renaissance Art: Gender, representation, identity* (Paola Tinagli, 1997)
- *Women in the Streets: Essays on Sex and Power in Renaissance Italy* (Samuel Cohn, Jr., 1996)
- *Women, Art and Architectural Patronage in Renaissance Mantua: Matrons, Mystics and Monasteries* (Sally Anne Hickson, 2016)
- *Women, Patronage, and Salvation in Renaissance Florence: Lucrezia Tornabuoni and the Chapel of the Medici Palace*(Stefanie Solum, 2015)
- *Women's Roles in the Renaissance (*Meg Lota Brown, Kari Boyd McBride, 2005)

Interlude:

OUR STORY SO FAR
WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED ABOUT ART, MONEY, AND THE RENAISSANCE?

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED SO FAR ABOUT ART, MONEY, AND THE RENAISSANCE?

– Caveat Magister –

As we pivot from looking at questions of art funding in the Renaissance to issues of art funding in the modern world, I want to take a moment to discuss why the Burning Man Philosophical Center is producing this series in the first place.

Black Rock City is treasured by its citizens as a culture where money cannot buy you citizenship — but many of our best citizens hurt each year as the cost of participating in Black Rock City rises.

Burning Man inspires people to transform their lives around art and whimsy, but as Scott Timberg has shown us in *Culture Crash*, art and whimsy are increasingly luxury items affordable only to rich hobbyists.

We don't need that data: we've all met too many Burners who are dedicating their lives to doing incredible things in their communities but are struggling to pay rent. Too many artists doing amazing work who are trying to scrape together the cost of materials, let alone find commissions.

The question of how to make a meaningful living in the world is hardly unique to Burners, but the biggest obstacles to the spread and adoption of Burning Man culture are arguably economic: how do people adopting an ethos of Decommodification and Gifting and Communal Effort thrive in a world that, despite the best efforts of utopians (along with many, many, not-so-good efforts), is based on currency transactions?

That is the question underlying most of the concerns and complaints we hear — from ticket prices to art grants to plug-

and-play groups on playa. And the truth is there isn't a clear answer yet.

So we're using the theme of Da Vinci's Workshop to ask the question. And we're doing it in public, so you can see what we're thinking, and even join in. Hopefully come up with even better ideas than the ones we've got.

If we succeed, this series will present new ideas and models that can be tested and tried by anyone inspired to do so, in or out of Burning Man. If we fail … well … every Burner knows that sometimes failure can be even more interesting and inspiring than success.

Plus you'll get to see us fail. Which will be fun.

What's Happened So Far

So — after examining the art, currencies, and ethos of the Florentine Renaissance, what have we learned?

The most vital point, as Larry Harvey illustrated, is that money it not innately opposed to the culture we're trying to create: the problem is that culture has become subservient to money. It's a fairly simple equation: money that goes where the culture tells it to enhances that culture; culture that does what money tells it to becomes plastic and soulless.

The Renaissance went to fairly extraordinary lengths — from Florence's use of two currencies to legal prohibitions on usury to religious damnation — to keep the power of money in check.

A successful use of money in support of culture, Eric Weiner suggests in his book *The Geography of Genius*, would create two conditions: diversity — of cultures, of ideas within cultures, and of talents and approaches to the world — and "discernment": the critical faculties needed to filter good work from bad and identify both subtle and important differences.

So to the extent that money brings in diversity — enhancing immigration and travel, creating new communities alongside old ones, and bringing people with different backgrounds and perspectives together on common projects — it can be an engine that powers an art scene.

But when money creates gated communities, gentrification, and epistemic closure it sounds a death knell for creativity and the local creative class.

To the extent that money is used to take chances in pursuit of excellence, it can be a boon to artists and the cultural landscape. To the extent that money conflates "bigger" with "better," "repetition" with "excellence," and circulates only among a select few rather than as a bridge to new talent, a scene is better off without it.

This is all well and good to realize — but it also assumes that the fundamental dynamics of arts and arts funding remain unchanged. What if they don't have to?

Stuart Mangrum argued that the Renaissance ushered in the era of the "star artist" and did away with the artists workshop as a standard model for apprenticeship, production, and monetization. He suggested that within the Burning Man community we are developing now new, more collaborative, workshop models, and that these could as hubs by with artists both learn their craft outside of the formal education system and work with others to buck economic trends.

Felicity Graham, in her series on art, gender, and the Renaissance, looks at the examples of Renaissance women who defied cultural norms to be both artists and patrons and determine that they were, in fact, engaged in a different set of practices entirely: "matronage," instead of "patronage."

Matronage, at base, involves not just commissioning art

but using the process of art commissioning to establish and deepen relationships, build systems that encourage the future development of art, and establish the legitimacy of the artists as a class. Though it was exemplified by the women of the Renaissance, a case can be made that it was at the heart of the greatest patronage. The example of a young Michelangelo being taken in by Lorenzo de Medici and joining his family while he learned his trade is perhaps the perfect example: it led to commissions, but was not a relationship based on money.

Where Do We Go From Here?

As we pivot to look at possible funding models and experiments in the modern era, I'd like to suggest that perhaps it is in fact matronage, rather than patronage, that we are actually looking to foster: that far from simply adjusting the flow of money, we want to establish and strengthen relationships between artists, their communities, and funding sources.

Part of the problem may be that artists have been atomized not only from themselves but from the broader community: the rise of museum culture and the establishment of specialized art schools, though conveying many virtues, have also served to create parallel institutions that in fact distance serious artists and art from daily life.

Supporting the arts in the 21st century may not be just a matter of funding: it may involve re-establishing those relationships, and creating stronger ties. Finding ways to connect artists to their own communities, and embed them in new ones, may be the most important task.

In the next part of our series, we'll take a look at some of the efforts Burners are making to change the way art is produced and conceived of, as well as the state of patronage in the 20th and 21st centuries, and see what happens.

Section 4:

HOW TO BUILD A RENAISSANCE IN YOUR BACKYARD

MAKING PATRONAGE WORK FOR US: RECOGNIZING THAT OUR COMMUNITY CREATES VALUE

– Caveat Magister –

Before we talk about 21st century art funding models, let's talk for a moment about 20th century culture jamming. Specifically the Billboard Liberation Front.

If you're not familiar with the BLF, they were an underground organization established by Burning Man co-founder John Law, who worked with a cadre of Cacophonists (including current Burning Man Education Director Stuart Mangrum) to humorously (and illegally) transform the advertising on billboards into anti-consumerist messages.

You can view their work on their website (and you should).

John used to not admit his affiliation with the BLF because he was in fact committing crimes that he could be charged with, and any public statements could have been used as evidence against him. But recently he told me that the statute of limitations for those crimes has passed, so the muzzle has come off.

But had he been charged in court, he said, he had an ironic defense prepared: his research has shown that in fact the activities of the BLF did not reduce sales or publicity for the products they turned into subversive, anti-capitalist messages — in fact they increased both those things. The attention their anti-consumerist messages generated also generated attention to the brands which had been hijacked. Far from committing a crime, the BLF — Law said he is prepared to argue — actually added value.

Now I haven't looked at Law's data (and I don't have that kind of time), but we all certainly know that something like this is possible. (If you don't believe me, read your Adorno.)

John was a little embarrassed by this, but the point isn't that the uptick in publicity that the BLF's activities generated undermined its anti-consumerist messaging. On the contrary, these pranks are still too scandalous for companies to accept as part of their branding, and remain inspirational prank-art to this day. It's that the conflict between the two worldviews that were happening in that moment was a productive conflict: generating more for each side than it could have gotten independently.

Fast forward from the old days of the BLF to last month's Global Leadership Conference, where Burning Man's Philosophical Center presented on the issues emerging in the "Art, Money, and the Renaissance" series. Afterwards person after person approached me, saying "I feel like I've been waiting for this ever since I became a Burner. I'm a business owner" (or an entrepreneur, or capitalist) "and I know that Burning Man accepts me — Radical Inclusion — but I have no idea how to bring what I do to this community in a helpful, legitimate way. I'm looking for guidance."

And the truth is that we don't have definitive answers for that — this is very much a work in progress — but we believe that the first place to look is in the ways that we can make the tension between Burning Man and consumer capitalist values productive, rather than destructive.

The idea for such an approach has been present for some time. In his 2013 essay "Commerce & Community: distilling philosophy from a cup of coffee," Larry Harvey quotes extensively from an email written by Kansas Regional Contact Zay Thompson, and it's worth quoting — at length — again here:

"On my community's Yahoo group, we've been talking about the intersection of commerce and community. What is the nature of the relationship between the two? As one person pointed out, it is natural to view people as a resource, as a means to an end, when operating in a system of commerce. I think it's okay to take this view as long as you can step out of the commercial context and realize that there are other dimensions to people, other values, and other ways of interacting. Commerce is okay if we simultaneously view the world in the context of other values that affect our attitude towards commerce.

Let me use a personal example to illustrate my point. When my family plays our annual Thanksgiving soccer game I view the family members on the opposing team as opponents to be defeated. In that context, my classification of them is natural and appropriate. That view is the true nature of our temporary relationship in the context of the game. They are people with the capacity to physically compete with me. Yet, I should always be ready to view my family members in other contexts. If my Dad stumbles and falls, I don't run over him in my rush to score on his team. My love for him and the value of human life causes me to suspend the game, help him up, and check to see if he's alright. Likewise, I don't continue to view my family as mere competition after the game is over. Thus far, I think we're on the same page with community conditioning competition and vice versa.

(…)

So what is the proper relationship between commerce and community? I think that real value of both commerce and community can be simultaneously created from the same event. I think this creation can happen without one value system being used merely as a means to sustain the other. This ideal is possible because commerce and community have peripheral effects that can be translated into value for each other. Think of all the stuff we end up buying to bring out to Black Rock City! All that stuff is purchased for use at the event and then transformed by our

relationship to one another.

To return to the soccer game example, playing soccer is fun and strengthens our family ties. But we only have fun if we play by the rules and authentically compete. A peripheral effect of the game's value system is used to support family value. Likewise, if I want to play soccer, I have to find enough people willing to form teams and compete without killing each other. Our family love and size assures me that I can achieve this. If we start hating each other, then folks will stomp off and the teams will fall apart, meaning the end of the game. In other word, a peripheral effect of our family value system is used to support game value.

And this is not a corrupt or artificial relationship! Producing a competitive soccer game is not the goal of family. Producing family love is not the goal of soccer. Yet, each value system benefits indirectly and peripherally from the other. Neither value system's end goals are sacrificed, and thus both benefit from each other without corruption. My view is that the relationship must create value in terms of both commerce and community. If there is a communal investment, it must be for communal value. If there is a commercial investment, it must be for commercial value. If there is an investment of both, it must be for value in terms of both.

So, I think one of the major goals in bringing our culture to the default world should be to show society how to simultaneously value commerce and community and not corrupt the two. Let community and commerce do their thing freely and naturally within their own contexts. When they exist in an organic rather than a corrupt or artificial relationship, they'll naturally benefit each other."

What could that look like in practice? One Burner out of Nevada has proposed a model. We can't speak to the soundness of his personal use of it — and as with John Law I haven't conducted a review of his numbers — but the idea seems like it combines Burning Man's approach to community with a keen

sense of how business works in a way that generates more art, and supports our community, while paying both artists and investors on a new scale.

The central insight of the approach by "Timeless" (Mathew Welter) is that the value of art is enhanced by its presence in our community. That the more a piece of art is seen and engaged with by our community — at Burning Man, at Regionals, and at community and public events — the greater its likely sale value.

Thus Timeless' system (which he calls Fundiversify — you can read his own description here) creates a model of patronage that emphasizes the civic use of art as an investment tool. This generates value for the art — and larger potential payoffs for the artists — while creating opportunities for art engagement that otherwise wouldn't happen.

In essence the system works like this: a patron sponsors the creation of an art piece to begin as a playa artifact (in Timeless' case, a large wooden sculpture), under the condition that it will then be left in the artist's care for a significant period of time to be used at community and public events. Only after that time can the piece be turned over to the patron, an ongoing display stipend negotiated, or sold.

This is as good for the artist as it is for the investor: it allows the artist to showcase their work with the piece itself, not just photographs in a portfolio. It allows the artist more opportunities to get press for themselves and their work. It allows the artist to earn additional revenues from the piece by bringing it to different venues and events. It keeps the work maintained and well looked after because, as Timeless notes, "nobody knows how to take care of these pieces better than the artists who build them." And it raises the sale price up over time, which gives the artist a better chance of earning large commissions in the future.

“There’s nothing that we own that’s more likely to be worth more in 10 years than our art,” Timeless said — which means that there is a strong hook for people who have the kind of money to invest in art that remains within the community.

One might think at first (I did) that this would end up giving potential patrons too much control over the art creation process — that yes, they would let the art stay in the community for a prolonged period of time, which is great, but that they would demand that the artist design things explicitly to increase their value over time, rather than following their creative inspiration.

However, Timeless says that in his experience, it’s just the opposite: that once an artist starts receiving big commissions to create pieces, the artist is far more financially independent and able to follow their muse for future projects.

“It’s liberated me as an artist to be able to express myself,” Timeless says, recalling that before having this kind of support he funded his first art installation by remortgaging his home. “I basically use the money from sales to fund my next pieces, and then if I get an investor for them, great, but they’re what I want to do, the impetus is all mine.” Once he has a history of selling pieces for a noticeable profit, investors will want a piece of what he’s going to do, and he can tell anyone who wants to push him in another direction that they can keep their money. He can even go it alone if he wants to, which is the ultimate freedom.

In essence, it creates a virtuous cycle: The value that initially attracts the investor/patron is produced by our culture and its community, and the act of supporting our culture and community creates other kinds of value — relationships that can be formed, connections that can be made, and perhaps even the commissioning of art for the community’s sake rather than just as an investment.

If this works, it could be a whole new approach to financial independence for big artists — and I also wonder if it couldn't be taken even further. Timeless began his experiment with a more conventional patron — a single person looking for an art piece that would be worth more money than he put into it over time. But if Fundiversify works, why couldn't it be opened to groups of smaller investors?

Most of us can't afford to cover the cost of a large-scale playa art piece. But if an artist whose work is known to the community were to put out a call for investors along the terms Fundiversify offers — "I am planning to build a piece like this, and will commit to sharing it with the community for a period of years before selling it, and you will get a share of the profits based on your investment" — why couldn't smaller investors join in to a kind of mutual fund, receiving their share of the proceeds when the piece finally sells?

This seems to me like a win-win: it is a way Burners can directly support artists to bring art to our community, and a way artists can get more money to do what they want to do without having to worry about a single investor making demands that impinge on their creative process. If it works at least as often as not, it also expands the pool of potential supporters for Burning Man style big art.

This has the added advantage of creating more of a community around each new piece of art — it's a way for more people to get involved and develop a relationship with artists, which is at the heart of the kind of matronage we want to develop.

Once again, a virtuous cycle.

Timeless is also hoping to expand and attract advisers to Fundiversify by developing an administrative body to help support future projects — to attract investors, help with transportation costs, maintain and housing equipment and

supplies, and even volunteer help for set-up. But while we'll hope for its success, his doesn't have to be the only one. Others could set such bodies up regionally, or anywhere artists congregate. Timeless explicitly considers this a system that should be open to anyone who wants to engage with it. "I'm hoping everybody can benefit," he said.

Fundiversify doesn't represent a whole new way to think about arts and arts funding. But it does recognize that many of Burning Man arts' organic virtues — its emphasis on community and community-based art — are also valuable in ways that we haven't leveraged yet, and can support virtuous cycles that generate more art for our community, more revenue for artists, and more ways for people to establish relationship with art and artists: relationships that may end up being just as important as any other component.

The Fundiversify model is one that should be experimented with by different communities, and if it works should definitely be an arrow in our quiver to reinvent the art funding process for the 21st century.

Nor should we forget the fundamental premise: that the tension between our culture and the world of consumption can be productive. The case of the Billboard Liberation Front shows us that this may very well happen whether we design it — or like it. Systems like Fundiversify, which recognize that our community, if its needs are taken seriously, adds value, are an attempt to make that work for us.

ART GETS MORE VALUABLE WHEN "DATA" BECOMES "RELATIONSHIPS"

– Caveat Magister –

The last article in this series sought to illustrate a fascinating point: that time spent in our community enhances the value of art, and that this added value can be measured in (among other things) financial returns.

This wasn't true back in 1996 — a time when the very notion of "Burning Man art" having more than its experiential value was absurd. Much in the way people today who have never heard of Burners Without Borders or understand the Regional Network say "Burning Man's just a party, it's not really changing the world," people back then said "Burning Man's just a party, it's not really making art."

Yeah, well.

To be "Burning Man art" now has provenance, and even influence. To be "Burning Man art" that people recognize, and that has stories attached, brings an even greater value outside of our own community. The art market may not share all our values, but it now values what we do — and that's something Burning Man artists can leverage.

Timeless (Matt Welter) developed a system to try to enhance both our community's exposure to art and the value of the art it produces so as to attract patronage and funding. Another approach, grounded in the same premise, has been floating around the Burnerverse for several years. The basic premise is that to use technology to streamline the capacity for artists and communities looking for Burning Man art to connect.

The road to-and-from Burning Man is a heroic struggle for

most Burning Man artists, who not only have to create their miracles but transport them vast distances, over hostile terrain, and then (if they don't burn them) cart them back.

It will never be convenient — but what if we could turn it into an advantage for them?

What if we could create a database that included all the locations across the United States that are potentially looking for public art displays, and the times they are likely looking? Could we transform the annual pilgrimage whereby our art goes across the United States unseen into a kind of parade for communities, festivals, and events across the country?

Now before you respond, stop for a moment and think about the magnitude of this undertaking: It sounds simple when you think of it as a technological issue, but it's extraordinarily complicated when you think of it as a research issue. We're talking about 50 states, dozens of large cities, hundreds of mid-size cities, thousands of small communities, and god knows how many festivals and events — on top of Burning Man community efforts. That's a massive amount of data, and it only gets worse: to be useful, some details about who to contact, what kind of facilities they have (and when) and what they're looking for, would be important not only to enter but then to keep track of.

(And then, if we take it outside of America, and to the world at large …)

It's enough to make one throw up one's hands at the prospect, asking "is it really worth it?" And in fact, there's a version of this approach that would be much simpler: just catalogue all of the art going to Burning Man every year, and let potential venues reach out on their own.

Such an approach would be easier, but it misses the point. Two

points, actually.

The first is that a database of our art rather than possible venues puts our artists in positions of passivity: they can be listed in the database, but can't do anything except wait for the phone to ring.

But even more vitally, the only way to successfully compile a project of this scope and unusual nature, is to reach out to state agencies, local governments, regional economic development agencies — that is to say, to create new relationships where none existed before. We already have relationships with our artists: the problem is precisely that our artists don't have relationships with the communities they have to pass through anyway.

So while the end result of this project would be a database that artists can look through to say "As long as I'm going to be around here anyway, who could I contact about getting my work displayed?" the process would be a giant outreach effort that would create new relationships and, through those relationships, open opportunities where none previously existed. If even a fraction of those relationships bear fruit, then suddenly there are new opportunities for Burning Man artists. And if some of what emerges from those relationships is successful, other people will want in.

It's easy to imagine that there are a whole host of cities, towns, and economic improvement districts that don't even know they want displays of big art, or Burning Man projects, because they've never been asked — or even imagined something like that is possible. A project like this is not only a way of getting on their radar, and creating connections, but saying "we've got something you might want. Here's what we bring to the table."

If we succeeded (and by "we" I mean Burning Man the culture, it may be a task better headed up by the Regionals or even

volunteers) the migration to and from Black Rock City could be a national parade of sculptures and art installations stopping in communities everywhere. It would create new connections between artists and venues, and provide significantly increased opportunities for artists to display their work, build followings, and in some cases receive payment.

But even if we fail, if that grand parade never happens, the new relationships made could still, over time, create the exact same opportunities for artists. As is true in so many Burning Man art projects, what happens in the process of doing it can end up being even more vital than the ostensible result.

The "Fundiversify" approach appeals to patrons by noting that art gains value as it moves through our community, thus making it an investment — if it's allowed to be a community asset. The outreach required for a technical database to become a new series of relationships creates more opportunity for that process of moving through our community to happen — and turns a trip that was likely to happen anyway into greater opportunities for artists.

Once again, the goal is to create a virtuous cycle: successful demonstrations of this approach will in turn get more communities, festivals, and organizations interested in offering homes to Burning Man art, creating more success stories, and in turn more opportunities. At which point investing in such art becomes a better and better prospect — as well as a means of enhancing civic life.

Creating relationships around our art may be the best way to get such cycles in motion for our artists. We start with information about who to call.

EMBED ARTISTS EVERYWHERE: THEY ARE THE COMMUNITY INNOVATORS THE WORLD NEEDS

– Caveat Magister –

So far our look at arts funding solutions in the 21st century has focused on the premise that art which moves through our community gains greater value in the marketplace — thus giving artists who are part of our community leverage.

But perhaps the more vital realization is the other side of that principle: art which moves through communities helps those communities. Art — and artists — are good for communities, and communities which support them flourish.

Which means that one of the key tasks to support a vital arts scene in the 21st century is to get more artists more involved with more kinds of communities. To re-think the idea that art has a particular niche in society ("it belongs in museums," or "is a thing we decorate walls with") and to recognize that all facets of society can benefit from direct engagement with the arts.

Artists Can Revitalize Communities

To some extent this is now an article of faith in economic development. The work of Richard Florida on the way the "creative class" creates economic vitality is so well known as to have become an automatic bullet point at TED talks, and has led to the formulation that creative entrepreneurs (not limited to, but especially including artists) set up in low-rent districts, create vibrant communities, and those communities end up being so desirable to people with money that they spend ungodly amounts of money to get in and the artists get thrown out.

Black Rock City is arguably a perfect case-in-point. The tent community made by artists and tricksters has become so valuable that people are asking how we can keep hordes of rich people from crowding everyone else out of a piece of arid desert with absolutely no market value or amenities. 25 years of dedicated work by artists created a line of millionaires out the door clamoring to get in. When you let art out of its box, that's what it can do.

Far from being impractical, artists in this view actually have tremendous power when they engage with communities — so much so that mainstream economic development agencies consider a focus on regional arts and culture to be a key strategy in economic development.

But while the implications for demographics and gentrification and economic development have been well explored, what this means for artists … not so much. If artists are powerhouses of community vitalization, how should artists organize? What should they do? How do we best utilize their abilities?

A series of experiments is pointing towards a new approach — one suggesting that you maximize artists' impact and opportunities by **embedding artists everywhere**. Not just in the museums, galleries, and educational institutions that have made up their traditional areas of influence, but hospitals, nursing homes, apartment complexes, grocery stores, tech companies, neighborhood associations, police precincts, construction sites, restaurants … everywhere.

Not because it's good for artists, or the arts — though it is — but because we finally take seriously the considerable evidence that communities with artists in them flourish.

The more we demonstrate that, the more artists will be sought out to do exactly what they do.

Artists Make Healthcare Better

If you doubt that artists can have this kind of impact, you should talk to Tim Carpenter, the founder of EngAGE — a non-profit that creates affordable senior apartment complexes centered around the arts.

We're not talking about offering classes in watercolors or sketching — we're talking about efforts to embed serious artists and artistic programming at a high level in every aspect of these retirement communities.

Why would someone do this — try to create senior housing focused on the arts?

Well, Carpenter says, there are two reasons, and one of them is that you get better quantifiable outcomes across the board.

"We've seen decrease in physicians appointments, decrease in hospitalization, better engagement in nutrition programs and exercise programs, increased socialization," he told me. "But I'm not talking about art that's just a kind of busywork: there's this pernicious disrespect we have for seniors where we don't expect anything out of them. They turn 60 and suddenly they all want to glue macaroni? No, these are professionally led art classes with real student goals across multiple levels and artists living in the spaces who are actively pursuing their projects."

But you don't have to take his word for it. A 2006 report on a long-term experiment conducted by by Dr. Gene Cohen out of George Washington University called "The Creativity and Aging Study" concluded that:

"Results reveal strikingly positive differences in the intervention group (those involved in intensive participatory art programs) as compared to a control group not involved in intensive cultural programs. Compared to the Control Group, those involved in the weekly participatory art programs, at the

one and two year follow-up assessments, reported: (A) better health, fewer doctor visits, and less medication usage; (B) more positive responses on the mental health measures; (C) more involvement in overall activities."

"In conclusion, these results point to powerful positive intervention effects of these community-based art programs run by professional artists. *They point to true health promotion and disease prevention effects.* In that they also show stabilization and actual increase in community-based activities in general among those in the cultural programs, they reveal a positive impact on maintaining independence and on reducing dependency. *This latter point demonstrates that these community- based cultural programs for older adults appear to be reducing risk factors that drive the need for long-term care."* (Emphasis in the original)

Less hospitalization, less need for doctors, better nutrition, better exercise, more independence, less need for long-term care, better mental health — the active engagement of artists in a community can make all that happen, and if these things don't strike you as worthy for their own sake (you monster), then, fine, let us also acknowledge that this has a strong financial benefit as well because healthier people cost society less. (It's true, but I feel dirty just saying it.)

The second benefit is less quantifiable, but far more noticeable: communities built around the arts and artists are places that someone would actually want to live.

What we've come to think of as "traditional" retirement communities are based on a hospital model: the residents are seen as sick patients and are treated accordingly, and the buildings are designed around hospital standards … and when was the last time anyone went to hang around a hospital just for fun?

EngAGE, by contrast, is a "senior arts colony" model, Carpenter

said. “It’s about how you create a higher sense of community in any environment. Art is one of the key components to why we’re human and why we’re alive. If you boil down the things that make people happy, the sense of purpose that art brings, the sense of explanation of why we’re here, invoking the creative spirit which I think everybody yearns for. Putting ‘art’ on the door is an inherent promise to come to play. It also creates a center and a hub in the community that invites people to come and check it out. We’re always having shows and performances, and it changes the way people view seniors and citizens of a community and what it means.”

Sounds like we need a lot more artists actively engaged in the retirement industry — and in healthcare as a whole. Why aren’t artists brought in to transform hospitals and doctors offices, not in a superficial way but as places for community? They need to be embedded.

“Thank you for keeping the city alive”

The idea that communities that have nothing to do with the arts and humanities can benefit from having artists around has pioneers well head of us — and they have proven the benefits.

One of them is Mierle Laderman Ukeles, who since 1977 has been the Artist-in-Residence for the New York City Sanitation Department.

Yes, you read that right.

The founder of “Maintenance Art” — the idea that art can be found in the repetitive tasks we do to keep things running, not just acts of new creation — Laderman Ukeles has spent nearly 30 years supporting the NYC Sanitation Department through her art.

She is not, alas, paid: she gets an office, though, and access, and has proposed plans for projects on both a small and enormous

scale.

Some of those seem conventional — she's spent years working with the department to turn one of the world's largest landfills, the Fresh Kills Landfill on Staten Island (yes, my understanding is that this is really a thing) into a massive park filled with public art. That's certainly one impact an artist-in-residence can have on a community like that.

But much of her work has been of a far different cast. Her first art project with the department? To track down every sanitation worker, shake their hand, and thank them for the keeping New York City alive. (Not clean, note, but "alive" — an important shift in concept.) Follow-up projects included shadowing workers on their jobs, studying their movements as if they were choreography, examining how they prevent injury, exploring how on-the-job concerns are brought up and discussed, and conducting interviews of everyone in the department asking how they handle the repetitive and mundane aspects of their work, and what they need to keep going. In essence, her work has created a stronger sense of community, enhanced morale, and developed communication around common struggles — in addition to helping the department beautify the city.

No one has (to my knowledge) conducted the kind of studies on Laderman Ukeles' work that have been done on the arts' impact on health and retirement communities, or the arts and economic development, but she has demonstrated what is possible: that an artist can engage with a community as unlikely as the sanitation department of a major city and find ways to use her work to connect, explore, and beautify. If we accept the studies that artists can do it for whole neighborhoods, and that artists can do it for retirement communities, Laderman Ukeles' seems to have proven that they can do it in the goddamn sewers, too.

Which means that artists should be there.

Better Approaches to Daily Decisions

The City of Vancouver is poised to be the next pioneer in this effort. As I write this, legislation is before the City Council to create the position of Artist-in-Residence for the City Engineer's office, and for the Department of Sustainability.

"We can vote funds as a council and that goes a long way, but getting staff inside and looking for ways to include art in their daily work creates huge opportunities," said Deputy Mayor Heather Deal, who is proposing the legislation (and is a Burner).

Having an artist work specifically and directly with these departments will mean that an element of aesthetic beautification can be brought to every project — transforming what is utilitarian into something beautiful, even extraordinary.

But artists-in-residence have the capacity to be far more than that, as Laderman Ukeles and the sanitation workers in NYC demonstrate. Because these departments are not just "jobs," they are communities trying to serve a greater community — a task artists are uniquely positioned to find new ways to support.

"We have discussed the importance of engaging the artists not only to help make physical things more beautiful but also to help staff see and address their daily issues and decisions differently," Deal said. Artists connect and work with communities in ways that others can't — or at least don't.

We'll eagerly wait to see what kind of results come out of Vancouver's approach. But Burning Man, of all organizations, is certain that having artists work with your civic infrastructure — your planning department, your Department of Public Works, your accounting crews — can make a difference. We're pretty confident we've proved that by living it.

Art Is Not Optional

What we're seeing is a compelling case, based on the examples of:

- Art as a force in neighborhood revitalization and economic development;
- Art as a driver of positive outcomes and better living conditions for health care and retirement facilities;
- Art as a facilitator of new kinds of workplace bonds and community outreach
- Which strongly suggests: artists enhance communities they're part of.

Artists accomplish this not because art is a quantifiable, utilitarian thing, but precisely because it is not: it speaks to what cannot be quantified and should not be ranked and measured against other values. Which is why communities rally around it, and it can have the impact it does. The expression of our humanity through art is good for humanity.

The research is on this is clearly present, we ourselves are a living example of it — one among many. And yet the larger conversation about the "place of art" and the "usefulness" (or lack thereof) of art does not acknowledge this impact at all. Twitter is hyped as a vital tool for connecting communities while art is dismissed as a disposable accessory.

We can change that.

The more art's capacity to make communities vital is recognized, and the more we get artists out of the traditional lane of museums and galleries and into businesses and neighborhoods and libraries and hospitals and communities of all kinds, the better for everyone.

Our community can change the conversation around the arts.

We can encourage our own civic institutions to follow in the footsteps of Vancouver and NYC and begin embedding artists into their civic processes. We can talk to our own professional communities about the benefits of embedding artists into their professional standards. We can hire them ourselves, if we're in a position to, for our own businesses or agencies. We can make it clear that these are experiments worth doing.

Ultimately, we can begin to set an expectation: any community that doesn't have artists embedded in it doesn't take its own welfare seriously.

REDESIGNING MONEY: AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL OF FUNDING FROM THE BURNING MAN COMMUNITY

– Caveat Magister –

"For artists to be rewarded for the value they bring to *society*," Will Ruddick says, "the value of the reward must come from that *society* — rather than based on the fiat based debt of for-profit banks."

When it comes to out-of-the-box thinking about money and its role in society, Will is on the global cutting edge. He's the founder and director of Grassroots Economics, a non-profit supported by Burners Without Borders, and one of the few agencies in the world that creates Community Currencies.

All money is fundamentally an agreed upon delusion — we all agree that these types of metal, or pieces of paper, or units on a screen, are valuable in a way that can be exchanged beyond their intrinsic use for other goods and services.

The more legitimacy a currency gets, the more civil society tends to warp around it: witness how panicked the whole world becomes when what is essentially billions of units of imaginary value — wealth entirely generated in the abstract through financial speculation — is "lost." Or look at real estate bubbles: the exact same house can soar in value overnight, then lose value, then soar again … even though it hasn't changed at all. Then, of course, there was the Dutch tulip mania of the early 17th century, when tulip bulbs were so highly prized that fortunes were made and lost by trading them as commodities.

Don't tell us this is based in reality. Money is the ultimate conceptual art project.

Community Currencies are Will's attempt to re-balance the relationship between communities and currency — creating new forms of money that are designed to create wealth within poor and undeveloped areas. Since 2010, Will and his organization have created unique currencies across six different impoverished communities in Kenya, which are in turn supported by a network of hundreds of local businesses and schools.

Here's how that generates real wealth: small business owners go about their daily economic activity, and usually have surplus left over that no one can buy, and that will otherwise go to waste. Let's say you're a fisherman, and most days you sell 90% of your fish, but can't sell the other 10% because the community is too poor to buy them. Well, if you accept a community currency, then people who couldn't otherwise buy your fish with the national currency can use the community currency to do so.

Suddenly people who would otherwise go hungry are being fed. That's great! But it doesn't stop there: now you, the fisherman, have a bunch of community currency, and one of the people who accepts it is a carpenter. Your boat needs repairs: now the fish you sold through the community currency has repaired your boat, which saves you all kinds of money and problems. And the carpenter pays an artist to put a mural on his shop — so now the artist has a bunch of community currency. And the artist uses it to pay his rent (because his landlord accepts it) and to buy fish.

What would have been waste and loss is transformed into real world value and concrete wealth. Rather than detracting from the economy, a well-established community currency adds to the economic activity and overall prosperity. Eventually this translates into gains made in the national currency too.

Pretty incredible.

(Not, to be clear, "Decommodification." There's no moral virtue to replacing one kind of currency with another — one's not "pure" and the other "dirty." One's not "good," the other "bad." The point here is to design money around the ends we want, not to be designed by it — which is entirely in keeping with the Renaissance Florence ethos of money we've discussed before.)

We've already seen how an individual artist can benefit from the presence of a community currency: people who otherwise couldn't pay for art suddenly have the capacity, and that capacity can turn into rent and food (along with opportunities to benefit the community) for artists.

But what if we think bigger? Once you've re-imagined the role of money, you have to ask: could the whole arts funding model change?

Ruddick suggests that while "it is painful to tell many artists that they are contributing to a system which destroys communities," that in fact artists — and arts funding models — should focus not on selling art to the highest bidder but on generating sustainable wealth for local communities.

Art, approached in this way, could even be seen as a kind of community currency itself.

This is an approach Ruddick himself hasn't explored, but he suggests that it would have several components:

- A community funding model for arts require artists to see themselves as part of a community.
- "If you are not producing art for your community," Will says, "you are simply part of the problem."
- That means artists, despite their own need to make a living, need to "ensure that your community can buy your art."

- When they do get commissions in national currency, they need to make sure they're investing the money in their local communities, to support other local wealth and culture generating institutions.

- But the ideal situation is to leave banks and national currencies out of the exchange entirely — letting art directly "purchase" the goods and services the artists need to live and thrive, thus using their art to not only support themselves but over time generate wealth for their communities.

"Ten percent of your effort should be here," he says, "supporting a community of distant peoples and creating global unity." But "Ninety percent of your effort should be here: with your community of neighbors creating local unity and resilience."

It's a stretch to imagine anything like that working in the world we live in — but the same could have been said of all of the Community Currency projects Will has worked on. That hasn't stopped him, and the difference it's made in the lives of thousands of people has been real.

A lot more real than the wealth generated by a real estate bubble.

It's hard to say if the creation of Community Currencies for the arts is compatible with the other models we're proposing in this series. In some ways clearly yes: it creates tighter relationships, which is the essence of Matronage, and it further embeds artists in communities. But it also raises difficult questions about whether it would end up being a kind of second-class currency for artists, potentially one more distraction from actually paying them. But it is an experiment worth conducting on its own terms: in some communities, it's working. That's as good as any a place to start. The basic premise: that money should serve the culture we want rather than culture serving the money we have, is compelling.

ARE THEME CAMPS THE NEW RENAISSANCE GUILDS?

– Caveat Magister –

Stick with me here, because this could be: the future. That's right, THE FUTURE! Are you ready for it?

First let's review. Key elements that could help working artists that have come up previously series include:

- The way Burning Man artists are revitalizing the tradition of artists workshops that train newcomers and don't depend on "star personalities" to accomplish their goals;

- The way in which an "ethos of money" that values public art can be crucial to keeping money moving through society in a way that supports art and artistic communities (among others);

- The way in which "matronage" is better than "patronage" — we don't need people writing more checks, we need people to be more personally integrated into artistic communities — and artistic communities to be more integrated into society. We need to build relationships that include money, but go beyond it.

And when we ask ourselves: "what kind of social structures would support these things? What would they look like?" It becomes very clear that we already have functioning examples, that they are already a vital part of Black Rock City, and that some of them are already beginning to engage with the world.

They are Theme Camps.

You've probably heard of them.

Though rarely seen as art themselves, a case can be made that it is Theme Camps — not mutant vehicles, not giant sculptures,

not dub-step — that are the most original and fundamental form of Burning Man art.

They are also a new, and incredibly flexible, form of social organization. In many ways they serve the function of artisan guilds in the Renaissance, but they are formed around a common artistic vision, not commercial utility. Some have membership dues; some have work requirements; they have a variety of different governance structures; but at their core, the basic premise is always the same: "we are organizing a community around a shared vision of art and whimsy that we can give to the community. Do you want to be part of it?"

On the playa, and at Regionals, Theme Camps — these communities — make amazing art happen, make incredible experiences happen, without asking for anything back.

The question we now ask ourselves is: what would happen if Theme Camps were to start doing that outside of Burning Man contexts? What if they were to become artists workshops and matrons for the default world, too, sponsoring and creating public art?

It's a great question, but it's not a new one. A number of Theme Camps are already doing it — and doing it successfully. It is their eagerness to engage, the strength of these communities and their desire to have a larger impact, that convinces us that this can work.

At their most basic level, if Theme Camps focused their activities in their local communities, it would build awareness and enthusiasm far more effectively (and accurately) than any thousand magazine covers or Huffington Post articles. Ours is a culture that really only transmits itself through personal interactions and shared activities: Theme Camps, like Regionals, could be our best ambassadors to the world around us.

Those ambassadors never fail to enlarge our community — but more important than pure numbers is the potential networks that can emerge out of more activities, especially public art projects and public works. The more good they do, the more strangers get connected. The more artists who are connected with artists, who are connected with civic institutions, who are connected with local businesses, who are connected with makers and doers and programmers … the more the abilities and intentions of all of these people are leveraged into art and gifting. Artists prosper when they are part of communities, and communities prosper when active networks are engaged in a spirit of giving and art.

The more normal this becomes in a community, the more eager the community will be to have artists embedded in it — which is perhaps the fundamental approach to a vital arts culture in the 21st century. It's not incidental that this will also support the public good … and in so doing create more opportunities for the development of provenance. If Theme Camps can normalize the idea of having artists involved in ordinary life, they will have made a profound change in the world

And if enough Theme Camps do this that they can start to relate to each other, forming networks just as the Regionals have, then …

Well, look …

In his book "The Gift," Lewis Hyde talks about the way that gifts are at their most powerful when they are in motion: when they move from community to community, person to person, never stopping for long — or when they inspire other gifts so that there is a cascade of activity. Gifts are at their weakest when they are simply stored on a shelf or hoarded. The greatest potential global impact Burning Man Theme Camps and regionals could have on the world would be to interact directly with their communities, with each other, and with Black Rock

City, to keep a constant flow of art and gifts moving around the world.

Does the idea give you shivers? It gives me shivers. Because once that happens, once enough people get involved, a new global ethos emerges. Art and gifts can connect us in new and profound ways that will inspire people to contribute. To be part of it.

But a renaissance of Theme Camps also presents new challenges — problems brought on by success — that we have not even begun to think through. These are also already happening as theme camp communities grow into entrepreneurial efforts and brands … and suddenly find that they can't bring those brands back to Burning Man. Because of course you can't bring your brands back to Burning Man.

This is a profoundly difficult circle to square: how can we simultaneously encourage Theme Camps that emerge out of Black Rock City to become vital communities in the world when we haven't figured out how to integrate such success back into Black Rock City?

We don't have an answer yet. It's a conversation that is just beginning, and it's a vital one.

The key, the hardest part, is preserving the spirit of the gift in theme camp activities that occur out in the world. There's nothing wrong with making a profit, let alone being self-sustaining. But if Theme Camps become just one more viable business strategy, then in the big picture they accomplish nothing. But **if, as they scale, they can preserve art and expression at their core, and never lose the spirit of gifting**, then a critical mass of them can change everything, and surely find a place back home. Their success, and ultimately our success, depends on their ability to be recognized as offering authentic experiences as a gift, rather than selling something

There's much work here to do, if our community wants to take on the challenge. Much work Burning Man has to do to be capable of truly supporting communities of Burners who are becoming the new guilds in the new Renaissance we hope to see. But if they're inspired to do it, Theme Camps as local communities within a global network can be at the vanguard of Burning Man culture, and the support of artists in the 21st century.

Conclusion:

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED ABOUT ART, MONEY, AND THE RENAISSANCE

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED ABOUT ART, MONEY, AND THE RENAISSANCE

– Caveat Magister –

It's not true that every culture gets the art they deserve. But they get the art they're willing to sacrifice for.

If Burning Man is an artistic powerhouse today, it is because over its 30-year history, its community has been willing to make heroic sacrifices for art.

Many of you are probably making one right now.

For most of our history every theme camp, every art car, every sculpture and installation, was not only a gift but a sacrifice: people who were not rich sacrificed their own money, people who were struggling against the clock sacrificed their time. People threw themselves at not just their own efforts, but into each other's projects, offering everything they had to make them succeed. Not just willingly, but passionately.

Their passionate sacrifices, freely offered as gifts, made "Burning Man art" exceptional.

Over time, we have found ways to mitigate the need for sacrifice — art grants, in-kind support, a community of active crowd-funders — and we have attracted the kind of people for whom hiring a team to build something big is not a sacrifice, which allows some people to be compensated for (or at least assisted with) their time and energy.

These are good developments: artists shouldn't have to be heroes to make art.

But make no mistake — that spirit of sacrifice is inspiring new

heroes every year. The fact that sometimes they don't have to sacrifice as much only makes them more ambitious. Burning Man is the greatest participatory art experience on Earth because our community will not let it be anything less. And when we make it easier, they take on harder tasks.

Burning Man has great art because we are a community that not only values art, but sacrifices for it. Over and over again.

The Paradox of Convenient Art

The issue we have encountered in this series is not that the world we live in does not value art. On the contrary: we are happy to look at it, download it, and access it anywhere. Never has a culture had more convenient access to all manner of art, from the classics of antiquity to the latest from across the globe, delivered in real time. And we love it. This is a good thing.

But that convenience creates its own challenge, as we now expect art to come to us like water from a tap. We have come to think of art as a utility: we grab artists' work without attribution (let alone payment) for our blogs, post other people's music up on sharing sites, pirate movies, search through digital libraries that don't compensate authors. Modern culture demands art as a right, insists that it be convenient, but scoffs at the notion that anyone should be inconvenienced, let alone sacrifice, for it.

That makes a huge difference.

Old Problems are New Again

In a 1996 paper on art funding in what he calls "The Ford Foundation Era" (1957 — 1996), John Kreidler made a staggering point: that with the exception of a few massively endowed academies, no structured arts organization has ever thrived without significant "discounted labor" — that is, without artists working on a volunteer or underpaid basis.

There is no other way this has ever happened. What the fuck?

This may put Burning Man's own use of so much volunteer created art into context, but it is also a humbling and disturbing fact. Something seems profoundly wrong about it.

It only gets worse.

"Artist" has never been a stable upper-middle-class profession that is compensated adequately for the time, energy, and education levels artists put in. Kriedler noted that "Although median household income for performing artists is not out of line with the median for the nation as a whole (and in fact was slightly higher), considering the educational attainment of the performing artists, it was very much out of line with income received by other groups with similar education and training." He quotes studies showing that historically artists spent more of their income than their peers in other professions on education and training; were unemployed more often than the general population, with their periods of unemployment lasting longer; and that they earn less over the course of their lifetimes than equivalently qualified colleagues in other occupations.

If the sacrifices people make for art at Burning Man are heroic, sacrifice may at some level be what artists do in order to advance their passions at all. In which case it may not be possible for us to ever come up with an arts funding system that guarantees artists a comfortable life.

If this is true, it's true both for cultural/economic reasons and because artists are constantly pushing the boundaries with what they have. Give them a barren patch of desert, and they'll turn it into a global happening. Artists are exactly the people who are willing to say "I don't care if it's good for my bottom line, this is worth doing!" They create an astonishing amount of value in their communities with whatever tools they have, and whether that's the contents of a junkyard or the costume

shop at the Met, they're going to want to push new boundaries of the possible.

Artists are, in many ways, analogous to what start-up founders would be if there were no venture capital system.

Why Ya Gotta Make Things So Complicated?

So yes, they're going to sacrifice anyway, but it's much easier for people to sacrifice for their art in times of relative income equality: they're not giving up access to mainstream economic life, even if they're giving up "winning" at it. But in times of mass income inequality — like the current era — going into the arts can be an economic death sentence. That's a dangerous state.

Kreidler's paper shows that this it can be mitigated: for all that the tools of the "Ford Foundation" era no longer work as advertised, while they worked they demonstrated that it is possible to leverage resources and new approaches to support artists in ways that require them to sacrifice less just to live — which both makes them more integrated into society and encourages them to make their art be more ambitious.

Similarly, Renaissance Florence had an ethos of art and money that kept enormous sums of wealth flowing through its public arts. It made very few artists rich, but it provided a more stable base for them to live and work, and instead of taking it easy they famously used the wealth that passed through their fingers to create even more ambitious projects.

It can be done. And when it is done, communities, cultures, and even civilizations flourish.

It's Not About the Benjamins

But the issue is not simply "more money." One of the first things we discovered in this series was that just adding money

to an arts budget doesn't create a vibrant art scene — and that there are even ways that pumping money into an art scene can kill it. What matters is the way the resources available are utilized: do they create personal relationships between artists and communities? Do they connect artists to other artists? Do they encourage the taking of risks and the exposure to new ideas? Do they create meaningful social bonds between artists and potential patrons?

To the extent that money does these things, it helps; to the extent that it blocks these things, creating walls and divisions between artists, communities, and funders, then a scene is better off without it. So the fundamental question is not: how much are we funding, but what kind of connections and relationships are we making? Focusing on that first, and then letting the funding follow, is the fundamental switch from "patronage" to "matronage" that we have come to see as at the soul of a compelling art scene in the 21st century.

New Models

We have proposed a number of promising experiments in matronage that we believe can support artists by developing relationships. Broadly speaking, there are three different kinds of approaches, each with two specific strategies that our community could engage in right now (and in some cases already are), without asking anyone's permission:

1) The development of new kinds of art and patronage communities:

- Artist workshops focused on teaching and production outside of the "star system" (perhaps exemplified by The Flaming Lotus Girls)

- Theme Camps as a new force of citizen patronage

2) Enhancing "Burning Man Art's" value in the existing

commercial market through the use of community to generate provenance:

- Fundiversify — an arts funding model in which investors fund art specifically for purposes of being in our community, with the time spent in the community enhancing its value, eventually leading to a greater profit (and enhanced creative independence) for artists.

- Outreach Database — wherein we use our community to create a comprehensive database of places, communities, and contacts potentially interested in hosting Burning Man art throughout the year.

3) Finding new ways to connect local artists to local communities of all kinds — form neighborhoods to retirement homes to businesses:

- Creating Community Currencies to support local artists

- Embedding artists in new kinds of communities

What has hopefully become apparent is that while all of these approaches have increasing arts funding as a goal, they are not fundamentally about money — they are about community. **The goal is not to get money in order to create the kinds of communities that support art, but to create those communities and eventually leverage them to enhance arts funding and support what they were going to do anyway.**

These models are less important, then, for their specifics — although we think these are good and worthy experiments that have the potential to do a great deal of good — but vitally important to establish what kind of approach helps us resolve the paradox of "art" and "money" in a way that is consistent with our values. At the end of this year of investigation, we are

ready to conclude that "community" is the bridge and between "art" and money" we are looking for. "Patronage" funds art. "Matronage" uses arts funding as an opportunity to build connection and community.

In the introduction to this series, we suggested that artists might need a Declaration of Independence. In fact they are better served by a Declaration of Interdependence.

There Are No Shortcuts

While it is vital to Burning Man's future, and the future of any healthy civilization, to find new ways to support arts and artists, we believe that to be truly successful those new approaches must have community at their core. When art is about community, and community about art, the two can reinforce each other and create a healthy whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. But when art is about money, or money about art, the two corrode each other, bringing out the worst in each.

This is not — absolutely not — to say that money must be kept away from art. Only that this is a case where money functions best when it is in service to other values. Our approaches to art funding must never be **about** the money. But increasing the connections between art and community creates additional value and prosperity. It's a virtuous cycle — if we don't take shortcuts. When we take shortcuts to make money, community suffers, and a decline in art follows. But when we are focused on creating art first, rather than creating art for the sake of money, then we will always have something around which to form community.

We may never be able to make "artist" a stable, reliable, safe job. The artists themselves may not allow it — and it's that spirit that makes them so crucial to communities everywhere. But we can create communities in which their value is recognized,

and support the sacrifices they make. We can stop taking advantage of their eagerness to make sacrifices on behalf of our communities, and instead celebrate it in meaningful ways. We are confident that they will take any stability we can give them, and turn it into risks worth taking.