

# Strategic Art, or: The Value of Contemporary Art for Management

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## Abstract

The value of art has many aspects and is therefore measured by manifold criteria. In an economic context the value of an artwork is preferably represented by its price tag. Some theoreticians emphasize that it is (only) the price that distinguishes an artwork from a regular consumer good, as it frames the spectators' perceptions and can be used for purposes of conspicuous consumption. However, when we focus on the *use value* of art rather than on its exchange value, conventional approaches tend to be conceptually dubious. This is particularly true for the use value of art in a business context which is not limited to mere corporate collecting. Evaluation criteria become fuzzy and results lack coherence: On the one hand, there is the argument that art is increasing motivation by making staff happy; on the other hand, it is emphasized that art will be useful by providing a substantial provocation. Bauer (2005) comes to the conclusion that research in this field needs a fundamental reorientation.

It is obvious that the search for alternative criteria represents a proper starting point for such a reorientation: if art is to provide a major contribution for business purposes, it cannot be reduced to the function of image sugarcoating as in the case of "corporate culture responsibility". Rather it has to address the level of strategic management, i. e. business strategy and corporate strategy. Thus the focus of interest is the strategic value of art. In other words, what can strategic management learn from (contemporary) art, or specific works of (contemporary) art, respectively?

We will use the term "Strategic Art" for those artworks and artistic concepts that are capable of contributing to the state of the art in management theory and practice. (Thus there is more to "Strategic Art" than a mere spark of inspiration and distraction for managers.)

There are strong signals that contemporary art can provide this kind of contributions:

- Some strategic thrusts like subversion, cross-appropriation or detournment that are rather common in contemporary art turn out to be particularly powerful in business contexts.
- Cultural theorists like Groys regard artists as a kind of economic avantgarde: the artist no longer operates as a creator, but as an exclusive and ideal consumer of things that have already been circulating in the cultural sphere. Instead of creating artworks the artist creates new attitudes, new consuming patterns and new desires.

In order to put some limits to this broad field, the paper is going to focus on the most important issues of strategic management. Therefore, three areas that, from the standpoint of business strategy, were identified as being particularly important: first, product development and innovation; second, customer orientation; and third, organizational and leadership processes. For each of these three areas, an example will be presented that shows how artistic works and concepts are able to transcend the current state of the art in strategic management.

**Keywords:** Strategic Management, Contemporary Art, Innovation, Customer Orientation, Leadership, Avantgarde