When Contemporary Art Galleries embrace experiential triggers: The End of the White Cube?

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ABSTRACT
This paper examines the strategic evolution of contemporary mega-galleries in response to market shifts. Historically anchored in the "white cube" model, galleries now increasingly adopt experiential levers traditionally used by museums to enhance visitor engagement and expand their audience. Drawing on the experiential levers identified by Puhl (2022a), the qualitative study implemented allow to identify four emerging models: the traditional "white cube," the "museum-like" model, the "art hub," and the "lifestyle" model. Each model leverages different experiential aspects, such as location, architectural design, and interactive cultural offerings, to create memorable experiences. The paper also explores how these strategies affect galleries' missions, legitimacy, and targeted audiences, highlighting the delicate balance between culturalization and commodification. This research contributes to understanding how mega-galleries navigate and redefine their roles within the contemporary art market.

Key words: Contemporary Art Galleries, Experiential Marketing, White Cube

Introduction

"We don't claim to be an institution, but we wanted to make something different from the traditional commercial gallery experience." Alice Workman, Hauser and Wirth Somerset Senior Director, refers here to the first "art center" of Hauser and Wirth, opened in 2014. This project is significantly different from the galleries in Zürich, London, Los Angeles, and New York. Large in scale, it brings together within a renovated old farm in the English countryside, spaces as diverse as an exhibition gallery, a residence for artists, a shop selling local farm products, a restaurant, guest rooms, and a magnificent garden designed by Piet Oudolf, renowned for his design of the High Line gardens in New York. It also hosts events: conferences, concerts, and offers numerous art workshops for local communities (schools, universities, families). Since then, the famous Swiss gallerists have inaugurated two similar projects, one in Los Angeles in 2016 in a former mill and another in Menorca in 2021 on an island in the middle of Mahon port. These plural spaces are notable for breaking with the classic contemporary art gallery model: a closed, ultra-codified universe, reserved for insiders and governed by strict rules, the white cube.

While the cultural sector (live performance, museums) continuously strives to offer ever richer, more original, and distinctive experiences to their audiences (Pulh, 2022b), art galleries have long remained stuck in the 1970s model, rejecting any initiative that could divert the viewer from contemplating the artwork. However, the world of contemporary art has been shaken up over the past fifteen years. The intensification of competition, the decline in gallery attendance, the emergence of new players, the digitalization of the economy, and the transformation of relationships with artists (Quémin, 2021) have led to a race towards gigantism. While small galleries resisted by adopting niche strategies and medium-sized galleries closed one after the other, large galleries prospered. Thus, mega-galleries emerged, major players in the contemporary art market, characterized by a strong international presence, multiple and grandiose exhibition spaces requiring colossal investments, a representation of numerous and prestigious artists, and the organization of large-scale exhibitions.

This race for gigantism seems to be accompanied by a paradigm shift in the production of cultural offerings, as some mega-galleries increasingly borrow from the museum field, questioning the whitecube. This phenomenon is what we propose to study from the perspective of cultural experience production. Indeed, cultural institutions can rely on experiential levers to propose a distinctive cultural offering to strengthen their positioning, attract audiences, and provide them with an extraordinary and memorable experience (Filser, 2002, Carù and Cova, 2006). This research, therefore, has two main objectives: (1) identify if experiential levers are newly used by mega-galleries of contemporary art to reach and seduce their audiences (collectors, artists, institutional partners, and visitors) and (2) map these galleries based on the identified levers to position them in an evolving landscape of contemporary art.

Literature review

- **The White Cube Challenged by the Experiential Paradigm**

The origin of the term "white cube" comes from Brian O'Doherty, critic and artist, who explained in 1976 in Artforum magazine that "*the gallery is constructed according to laws as rigorous as those that governed the building of churches in the Middle Ages. The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. The walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the source of light [...] art is free to live its own life.*" The white walls, zenithal light, absence of shadows, and neutral floor allow the "viewer" to extract himself from the outside world and focus on the artwork, positioned majestically, just as the "black box" in cinema forces the spectator to focus on the film. Beyond the arrangement of the exhibition space, the white cube offers a unique model of artwork reception; it abstracts the visitor from all external manifestations. The disembodied visitor must adopt a solemn behavior, wholly focused on the sacralized artwork. This is the model of the contemplative viewer (Filipovic, 2014)

The representation of the viewer on which the white cube is based contrasts sharply with the experience-seeking model of Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), widely established in the cultural sector. It essentially erases any sensory dimension of the individual at a time when, more than ever, audiences are in search of memorable experiences rich in meaning and emotions (Lipovetsky, 2006; Gauchet, 2004; Cova and Cova, 2004). Experience arises from the interaction between an individual, an object, and a situation (Punj and Stewart, 1983). Therefore, it has a strong subjective character. The consumer becomes an actor in his own experience in a co-creation process (Carù and Cova, 2006), playing an essential role in the construction of his experience (Pulh, 2002b; Cova and Cova, 2004). There is not just one "viewer" but diverse audiences with various expectations. Falk (2009) explains that in the museum field, the visitor can take on several roles over the course of visits: explorer, facilitator, experience seeker, professional, or regenerator. Similarly, there is not one but many cultural experiences. Numerous studies have sought to identify the dimensions of cultural experience (Bourgeon-Renault and Filser, 2010) to better understand cultural consumption behaviors. Four main dimensions emerge (Heilbrunn, 2005; Roederer, 2008): the aesthetic experience, the rhetorical dimension focused on the quest for meaning, the praxeological dimension (interactions with the environment and others), and the temporal dimension. The white cube tends to ignore certain dimensions, including the praxeological one by minimizing interactions, which can lead to a refusal to visit cultural facilities due to a lack of sociability (Champagne-Poirier, 2019) and seems to offer only a unique experience centered on artistic reception that encourages contemplation and reflection.

- **Experiential levers**

Faced with a consumer in search of strong and memorable experiences, cultural institutions have successfully understood the stakes related to offering a differentiating experiential offer by acting on the experiential context (object x situation) (Puhl, 2022a).To this end, they can rely on three main levers (Filser, 2002, Carù and Cova, 2006, Pulh, 2022b): the dramatization of the place (the situation or the spatiotemporal framework), the storytelling of the cultural offering (the object : core and peripherical offer) proposed during the lived experience also, and the active participation of the consumer (the person). By acting on the setting (architecture and symbolism of the place, scenography), on the definition of the cultural offering (choice of artists, works, company values, peripheral products and services), and on actions aimed at encouraging audience engagement (immersive devices, conferences, etc.), cultural structures shape their experiential offering and position themselves in the cultural landscape.

These main levers have already been studied in the context of museums, performing arts, and festivals (Mencarelli and Pulh,2006, Mencarelli, Pulh et Marteaux, 2008, Pulh, 2022a). It seems appropriate today to question the use of these levers by mega-galleries of contemporary art. Indeed, galleries now operate in a framework undergoing significant economic, managerial, and sociological transformations (Quémin, 2021). Moreover, museum/gallery relationships are becoming more complex, with museums increasingly collaborating with galleries due to insufficient public funds, and galleries, in search of legitimacy, expanding their actions by borrowing more from the museum field. Considering the experiential levers previously mentioned, we aim, in this research, to highlight if a paradigm shift operates in the production of cultural offering by mega-galleries of contemporary art. To answer that, we will first identify the experiential levers used by those galleries and, secondly, implement a mapping to highlight the evolving landscape.

Methodology

Before answering the two questions above, we must first define the contemporary art mega-galleries that will be considered in this research. The impossibility of knowing the reality of art transactions makes it impossible to rank based on turnover (Quémin, 2021). Therefore, we decided to rely on the 2023 Artfacts ranking, which is widely recognized by contemporary art market players. Although it does not disclose its algorithm, Artfacts explains that it considers a multitude of criteria, including the discovery of new talents, the representation of artists, participation in fairs (including Art Basel, the most important one), and the exhibitions organized. The result is a list of the 10 largest contemporary art galleries in the world.

Tab 1. List of the 10 art galleries studied

Ranking	Gallery name	Nationality	Date of creation
1	Gagosian Gallery	United States	1980
2	David Zwirner	United States	1983
3	Hauser & Wirth	Switzerland	1992
4	Pace Gallery	United States	1963
5	Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac	Austria	1983
6	Galerie Perrotin	France	1990
7	Almine Rech	France	1997
8	Galleria Continua	Italy	1990
9	Lisson Gallery	United Kingdom	1967
10	Galerie Lelong & Co.	France	1981

The exploratory nature of this research led us to adopt a qualitative approach by using a non-participative observation of mega-galleries' activities. This observation is based on secondary data available on the internet: websites, social media, press releases... Based on the literature review, an analysis grid was then developed to highlight the key empirical levers. This grid considers the three main types of levers identified in the literature (Puhl, 2022a), which we have adapted in the context of contemporary art galleries: those related to the development of a spatio-temporal framework for the experience, those related more specifically to the cultural offer (through the development of its central and peripheral offer) and those related to audience engagement (Appendix 1).
The analysis was carried by researchers involved in the project. Each researcher coded the different observations on all 10 mega-galleries. The coding was then pooled after discussions on any coding disagreements that may have arisen.

Main results

The cultural experience arises from the interaction between a place, an object, and a person (Pulh, 2022a). The systematic observation of our secondary data highlights that galleries today have mainly invested in two primary types of experiential levers: the place, or rather the places, given the multiplicity of spaces owned by mega-galleries, and to a lesser extent, the object, which is the cultural offering. The activation of the individual within a co-construction approach remains rare.

- **The Place: a strong investment in the spatial framework**

The choice of location has always been strategic for galleries, often leading them to globally recognized cities and cultural districts near museums, highlighting the qualifying function of urban space (Quémin, 2021). For instance, Lisson Gallery establishes itself in cultural districts like Shanghai’s Amber Building on Huqiu Road and Hollywood’s Sycamore District. Many galleries have also opened branches in chic areas frequented by collectors, such as Gagosian, which has 17 permanent locations, including six in NYC, one in Gstaad, and one in Beverly Hills. Almine Rech is present in Gstaad and Avenue Matignon in Paris. However, in recent years, some mega-galleries have established themselves in peripheral neighborhoods, a trend seen since the 2010s among medium-sized galleries due to exorbitant central district rents. Ropac gallery has settled in Pantin, a Parisian suburb, while Gagosian has set up in Le Bourget. They justify this by the need to exhibit large works and offer different visitor experiences. Other galleries have made bolder territorial choices, far from typical collector locations. Galleria Continua opened its first gallery in San Gimignano, a historical town in Tuscany, far from usual contemporary art venues. It also established itself in a former cinema in Havana, Cuba, and within the Paraemby stadium in São Paulo, combining heritage sites and popular spaces. By investing in "ordinary" places like villages, cinemas, or stadiums, they offer an "extra-ordinary" experience for contemporary art galleries. This blend of past settings and present contemporary art allows galleries to theatricalize spaces and create specific ambiances, facilitating sensory and emotional overstimulation (Bourgeon-Renault and Filser, 2010).

At the same time, and like superstar museums, recent investments have allowed galleries to capitalize on the architecture of the location by calling upon renowned architects (Gagosian enlisted Jean Nouvel, architect of the Louvre Abu Dhabi, for its site in Pantin, France). Thus, like museums, they seek to enhance the value of the experience offered to the visitor while bolstering their reputation. The place itself becomes a destination due to its gigantism (Ropac presents 2000 m² of exhibition space in Pantin, Galleria Continua has bought more than 40,000 m², Les Moulins, in the Île-de-France countryside) and its prestige (Ely House for Thaddaeus Ropac in London). Almine Rech presents its brand-new flagship in Tribeca (10,000 m² in a historic building dating from 1881). Ethan Buchsbaum, senior director in NY, explains how this building is perfect “*to mirror the tremendous expansion of the gallery in the US.*” Paul de Froment, managing partner, adds that it is the ideal place “*to offer something which is quite unusual for a gallery.*” Certainly, an extraordinary experience for a gallery, but not for a museum. Thus, galleries increasingly adopt museums’ codes, starting with prestigious location and huge exhibition spaces.

By directly occupying museum spaces with the loan of artists' works for temporary exhibitions or more lasting collaborations, mega-galleries come even closer to museums. Tate Modern in London exhibits the artist Pascale Marthine Tayou, represented by Galleria Continua, in a dedicated room for one year. Cy Twombly (Gagosian) painted the ceiling of the bronze room at the Louvre. Hauser and Wirth also fully collaborate with museums (they set up a space within the Holburne Museum in Bath, and co-manage the Chillida Leku Museum in Spain). This latter gallery is undergoing an even more significant transformation. Hauser and Wirth has chosen in recent years to move beyond the classic gallery model, a place for exhibition and sale, to create what they call "art centers." These plural spaces, rooted in the territory, include exhibition spaces but also a garden, historical buildings, dining options, a shop, and even guest rooms, where activities around art and cultural events are offered. An 18th-century farmhouse in Somerset has been completely renovated, as well as a mill in Los Angeles, and a former military hospital in Menorca. This type of hybrid space can also be found at Galleria Continua in Paris. In 2021, it inaugurated its "art supermarket" in Paris, which includes an exhibition space, a room for talks and conferences with artists, an art bookstore, a delicatessen, a bar, and even a gelateria, "*a welcoming space open to experimentation, flexible, inclusive, and accessible to all, while not architecturally adhering to the canons of the white cube*."

Cultural institutions can enhance the sensory dimension of experiences by creatively staging their spaces, similar to music festivals, performance halls, and museums (Pulh, 2022). While galleries have invested heavily in buildings and "art centers", they often cling to the modernist white cube exhibition model inside. For example, Perrotin will move into the former Del Mar cinema in Los Angeles in 2024, preserving its architecture but maintaining the white cube inside. However, this study suggests that new staging forms can transform the public-artwork relationship by playing with the decor (Filser, 2002). Artworks are now exhibited in unique settings: in nature (Yorkshire Sculpture Park, UK - Pace; DeCordova Sculpture Park, USA - Lisson), in the Saudi Arabian desert (Gagosian), in preserved historical buildings (La Havana cinema - Galleria Continua; Howard Castle - Thaddaeus Ropac; Couvent des Jacobins - Perrotin), in hotels (Five Arms, Scotland - Hauser and Wirth), or immersive spaces (Lightroom in Seoul - Lelong). These new experiences move away from the neutral white cube model, supporting Girel's (2004) view that diverse diffusion places lead to diverse audiences and receptive experiences. This allows for rethinking the relationship between place, artworks, and audiences to meet both public and artists' expectations for new forms of engagement.

- **The Object : Primarily an Enrichment of the Core Offering**

While galleries are increasingly leveraging the experiential potential of the place (location, architecture, history), they are more hesitant when it comes to their cultural offering (the object). Based on the works of Pulh (2022), we have identified four main types of experiential levers concerning the offering: the qualitative and/or quantitative excess of supply, the amplification of the sensory relationship to the object, the foregrounding of peripheral services related to art, and finally, peripheral services unrelated to art.

Today, they all play the excess card. Major players in the art world, they represent many living artists, in addition to the estates for deceased artists. Their exceptional roster (list of artists) allows them to organize exhibitions worthy of the greatest museums, where the majesty of the venues combines with the richness of the programming (both in terms of the number of works presented and the reputation of the artists). Thus, one can read on the Gagosian website: "*Gagosian has prepared and presented unparalleled museum-quality exhibitions of works by historical artists... The gallery's groundbreaking Picasso exhibitions, curated by scholar John Richardson in New York and London, were attended by hundreds of thousands of visitors.*" To reinforce the exceptional nature of the exhibitions, mega-galleries enlist the services of star curators such as Edward Enninful, former editor-in-chief of Vogue UK, for the R. Mapplethorpe exhibition in Paris, or former museum curators like John Elderfield (formerly of MoMA) for Gagosian. Beyond the experience offered to the audiences (visitors, collectors, art critics), this contributes to the gallery's branding and the construction of its reputation. However, few mega-galleries resort to sensory amplification. The white cube model and the contemplative viewer of a majestic artwork still predominate in most of them. In their quest for legitimacy, they defend reputedly difficult art and avoid the implementation of any interactive devices that would make them slide towards edutainment. Occasionally, if the artist wishes to offer the public an extraordinary experience, the gallery may decide to follow. This is the case with Hauser and Wirth and the Pipilotti Rist exhibition in Chelsea, conceived by the artist as a multisensory experience for visitors where colors, sounds, and textures intertwine. Expography then takes precedence over museography (Desvallées and Mairesse, 2011). It is no longer about filling a space with works but offering the best mode of exhibition starting from the exhibited works.

To amplify, extend the experience, or offer an online alternative to physical visits, galleries utilize experiential levers related to peripheral cultural offerings. Mega-galleries are cautious and few venture beyond contemporary art. As museums, all publish exhibition catalogs and art books about the artists they promote (Pace: +500 books, Thaddaeus Ropac: +300 books). Gagosian enhances its brand with the online magazine Gagosian Quarterly, while Hauser and Wirth publishes the print magazine Ursula. Many galleries offer special events, free or paid, such as artist talks and conferences. They maintain a presence on YouTube and other social networks (Instagram, Facebook, WeChat for Asia) and extend the cultural experience online through a vast collection of videos. Perrotin features a rich playlist with series like “Behind the Scene” (exhibition installations), “L'amour de l'art” (artist discussing other artists), “Salon Perrotin” (personalities discussing an artist), and a web series “4’17” covering contemporary art news, alongside talks and interviews. All observed sites offer viewing rooms, either permanent or temporary, aligned with current exhibitions. Most use the white cube format, presenting works on a white background, and in a few cases, allowing users to zoom in on the artworks.

Few galleries have extended their peripheral offerings beyond the core offering. All ten galleries have online and sometimes physical stores and mostly offer books, exhibition catalogs, exhibition posters, and limited editions. Six of them have extended their offerings to everyday objects, reinterpreted or not by artists. Only three (Hauser and Wirth, Galleria Continua, and Perrotin with its speakeasy in NYC) offer dining spaces at some of their locations. To respond to the blend of cultural genres and the diverse consumption logic of the public, which are simultaneously playful, educational, and aesthetic (Lahire, 2004), these same three galleries have decided to offer new and multifaceted experiences to their audiences. For instance, Hauser and Wirth ends its season in Menorca with a big festive event as announced in their press release: "*Join us to mark the last day of the season with drawing sessions for the whole family, live music, a celebratory lunch at Cantina—and a last chance to see our exhibitions ‘Christina Quarles. Come In From An Endless Place’ and ‘After the Mediterranean.’*" Perrotin organized in October 2020 "*a massive contemporary art treasure hunt, free and open to all under the nave of the Grand Palais in Paris*." Galleria Continua goes further by offering a "*contemporary art getaway*" from 3 to 11 pm with a departure by bus from Paris to the countryside, including exhibition visits, tastings, and a DJ.

- **The Person : A still limited activation of the visitor**

Of the three components of the experience, the visitor is the one over which a cultural organization has the least control. Indeed, individuals have their own cultural background, motivations, and barriers. However, museums and galleries can develop mechanisms that allow them to co-construct their experience (Carù and Cova, 2006). The museum experience can then be considered as "*the unique combination of an individual's identity project and the resources provided by the museum*" (Debenedetti et al., 2011).

The galleries' conception of the visitor determines the mechanisms implemented. The white cube perfectly caters to the contemplative visitor, while the participative visitor questions the relationship between space, artwork, and the public (Bianchi, 2016). The studied mega-galleries primarily rely on reactive central participation (Pulh, 2022). The public can sign up to meet and listen to the artist present their work (e.g., Michelangelo Pistoletto during his South American tour for Galleria Continua) or attend an artist performance (e.g., Solo show of Bernard Venet at Galerie Perrotin). Some galleries, driven by a participative vision, implement mechanisms encouraging more active public involvement: mediation devices for schools and local communities that foster interactions between the public, gallery staff, and artists. Hauser and Wirth's Education Lab, found in its art centers (Los Angeles, Somerset, Menorca), provides an ideal setting for visitor activation. For example, Menorca's Education Lab, inspired "*by the exhibition 'Rashid Johnson. Sodade,' (...) is the result from workshops with over 350 participants connecting black and blue colors with emotions and the song 'Sodade' by Césaria Evora*." Visitors can also participate in happenings like the "Do-it walking sculpture" by Galleria Continua, where the audience accompanied a large ball artwork by Michelangelo Pistoletto through the streets of Santiago. The gallery sets the conditions for a shared, emotion-rich experience in which the public plays a key role.

In contrast to museums, galleries do not seem to embrace interactive cultural mediation devices such as tablets or apps. Only Gagosian offers the possibility to read an art book dedicated to the artist for a limited time (online reading) in addition to an exhibition and outside the visit time. The galleries' quest for legitimacy could explain this refusal of interactive devices, which can corrupt the relationship between the viewer and the artwork by distracting them (Vom Lehn and Heath, 2016).

Finally, galleries can activate visitors by encouraging their engagement beyond the cultural experience. Research by Pulh (2022) in museums and live performances suggests that individuals' roles can extend from mere visitors to communicators, financial supporters, volunteers, or even brand ambassadors. This multiplicity of roles is rarely found among gallery audiences. While visitors can become collectors, galleries seldom expect them to take on communication tasks or become volunteers due to the high risk involved. A gallerist's profession includes managing the gallery's image and attracting critics, curators, institution directors, fair organizers, collectors, and artists, primarily through public relations (Quémin, 2021). However, some galleries, like Hauser and Wirth, Galleria Continua, and Pace, have recently engaged in activities aimed at creating genuine dialogue with surrounding communities to co-construct cultural programs. This includes learning programs developed in partnership with schools, teachers, artists, and local cultural organizations, collaborations with local artisans and producers for peripheral product offerings (Hauser and Wirth in Somerset or Menorca), and creative and educational projects. Pace Gallery, within its Culture and Equity Committee, collaborates with the association Black Lunch Table, which aims to highlight the work of Black artists.

Discussion: From the White Cube experience to plural experiential models

Art galleries stand at the crossroads between art and commerce and rely on different business models (Lazzaro and Picchi, 2023), often divided into two groups: retail galleries, focused on sales, and production galleries, more invested in the art market. The latter group approaches artists, supports them, organizes exhibitions around their works, and thus contributes to their valorization (Lazzaro and Picchi, 2023). Mega-galleries belong to this second group and are characterized by their high capital intensity. Their colossal means allow them to invest more easily in experiential levers, thereby evolving their value proposition. They increasingly borrow from institutional models, such as museums and art centers, and their offerings can even extend beyond the cultural framework to encompass lifestyle elements. Based on the exploratory study conducted, four experiential models seem to be emerging (Tab. 2).

1. *The traditional white cube model*

This model persists despite the changes made within galleries. With white walls, concrete or parquet floors, the artworks are presented majestically. Experiential levers (place, object, and person) are rarely used even though the white cube constitutes an experience. It primarily targets collectors and connoisseurs, offering them a codified experience in which their role is limited to contemplation, reflection, and purchase. The gallery thus reinforces its role as art dealer and artist promoter and remains relatively closed to the general public. Lisson and Lelong galleries belong to this category. Occasionally, a scenography designed by the artist can shake up the neutrality of the setting and offer a slightly less conventional experience (Barthélémy Toguo exhibition for Galerie Lelong, with walls painted blue, the artist's fetish color).

2. The « Museum-like » model

While museums emancipate themselves and take artworks out of their buildings by organizing off-site exhibitions, galleries are moving in the opposite direction by investing in institutional spaces and imitating them to gain legitimacy. This trend toward the museification of galleries allows them to strengthen their reputation, a key resource (Benhamou et al., 2002), and their role in the market. They rely on levers that museums have invested in the past: remarkable buildings, recognized architects, flagship exhibitions, a multitude of exhibited works, renowned curators, scenography, and the publication of exhibition catalogs. Galleries are no longer reserved for collectors alone and see their target audience expanding. Thus, they take on the mission of dissemination to a wide audience, one of the four museums' action fields, along with conservation, education, and research. Gagosian or Almine Rech in NYC belong to this category. They can also accompany these large exhibitions with cultural mediation actions for schools and art schools (education mission). They then activate the audiences and support them in the co-construction of the experience.

3. The ArtHub model

Some galleries go even further and closely resemble contemporary art centers. They combine organizing exhibitions and broader cultural events, producing artworks, experimenting, mediating to all audiences, and providing artistic and cultural education. This is the case with Hauser and Wirth with its artist residencies and Education Lab, or Galleria Continua. The gallery's legitimacy then rests as much on the quality of its roster as on the actions it undertakes on the ground. They rely on experiential levers related to the place by favoring sites with high heritage value (Galleria Continua's cinema in San Gimignano, Hauser and Wirth's old mill in Downtown LA). These unique locations facilitate scenography work as well as sensory amplification and enhance perceived value (Mencarelli, 2008). But they also leverage aspects related to the object and the person. The core offering is complemented by rich peripheral services (restaurant, shop, cultural events, artistic activities...). These places are meant to be deeply rooted in the territory and address a broad audience. The community projects involve local groups, aiming at harder-to-reach demographics. The mega-galleries that engage in this model go further than the previous one in their approach to education, mediation, and activating the audiences.

4. The Lifestyle model

Finally, beyond contemporary art, it is possible to expand the cultural offering to other art forms and extend the brand territory by offering a so-called "total experience" with a multitude of services centered on the art of living: restaurant, heritage tours, nature walks, a shop with a varied offering, and even hospitality. The mega-gallery offers its traditional target of contemporary art enthusiasts and collectors the experience of a "destination" where peripheral services take a central role, on par with art. In doing so, it also increases actions aimed at local communities with a focus on dissemination, education, and mediation, thus avoiding the risk of being accused of edutainment, which could harm their reputation. As Iwan Wirth explains about Menorca, "the creation of a gorgeous setting – the gardens, the restaurant, the ambience – plays the role of a 'Trojan horse,' almost a subterfuge, for bringing people to the art. It's about accessibility, to open your mind to contemporary art, in a magical setting."

These four models are not mutually exclusive. The multitude of locations that mega-galleries possess allows them to offer different experiences according to the targeted audiences: the white cube model in Dubai for Galleria Continua, an art center in Havana, and a lifestyle model in Paris.

Tab. 2. Experiential models of mega-galleries

	White Cube	Museum-Like	Art Hub	Life Style
Audiences	Small Amateurs & collectors	Small Amateurs, collectors, and usual museums visitors	Wide including local communities	Wide including local communities
Main Missions	Sales + Promotion	Sales + Promotion + Exhibition	Sales + Promotion + Exhibition + Education + Cultural mediation +	Sales + Promotion + Exhibition + Education + Cultural mediation +

			facilitation of creation (artiste residency)	facilitation of Creation + Entertainment
Key experiential levers invested				
The situation (the place)	+	++	+++	+++
The object (central & peripherical offer)	+	++	+++	+++
The person (co-production)	-	+	++	+++

Conclusion

This research offers two main contributions. First, while the "trend towards the commodification of cultural offerings" has been highlighted previously (Puhl, 2022b), the reverse process, the "culturalization of the merchant sector", has received little attention in previous research. This paper examines the evolution of mega-gallery strategies that increasingly borrow from the museum field. If public museums are developing strategies to increase their own resources (offering paid peripheral services) to cope with a challenging financial environment, mega-galleries, on the contrary, are expanding their scope beyond the sales of artworks by organizing free exhibitions, hosting artists in residences, and implementing cultural mediation initiatives. The boundaries between legitimate institutions and art dealers continue to blur, thereby reinforcing the power of mega-galleries in the market. Secondly, this research questions traditional gallery business models focused on sales and artists promotion (Lazzaro and Picchi, 2023) by identifying new activities (publishing, curation, support for creation, mediation, but also restaurants, cafés and hospitality). Some galleries are thus venturing into the realm of lifestyle, positioning contemporary art as a way of life. We thus highlight that mega-galleries oscillate between culturalization and commodification. In search of legitimacy, they seek to appropriate the codes and resources of museums, but at the same time, they open boutiques and offer everyday objects designed by artists. A position that can be difficult to maintain on a long term perspective.

Three main limits need to be mentioned. First, the focus has been limited on mega-galleries, therefore eluding the activity carried by all the others small and medium galleries, that can present a very different reality that the one depicted in this study. Therefore, we do not claim to have circumscribed the world of art galleries. Secondly, and consequently, due to the chosen field of study, we have excluded art fairs from the research. As major players in the contemporary art market, the experiential dimension of these fairs has always been more pronounced than in art galleries. Therefore, their study constitutes an opportune research avenue. Finally, the methodology employed does not allow to catch all the hidden activity of RP that is implemented with the collectors' targets.

This study also offers different promising research perspectives. The business model shift that is highlighted in the results constitute an interesting perspective to explore. A next step in our work is to interview the art galleries that have implemented these strategic changes, mainly toward arthubs and lifestyle models, to better understand the motivations behind these new strategies. Moreover, the question of how the public receives these new strategies deserves to be asked. How do collectors perceive these changes? Do these new models help broaden the audiences for contemporary art? Does a lifestyle place like Menorca truly play the role of a Trojan horse as explained by Iwan Wirth, bringing people to contemporary art by indirect paths?

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Appendix 1: Key empirical levers observed (based on Pulh, 2022)

SITUATION
spatio-temporal framework

- Ouside of the walls exhibitions (museums, online, private home...)
- Establishment in non-conventional places (heritage, natural sites, suburban areas...)
- Remarkable buildings (famous architect, symbolism)
- Thematization of the place
- Lifestyle places

OBJECT
central and peripheral offer

- Over-experientialization of central offer
  - Quantitative and qualitative excess
  - Sensory amplification
- On-site peripheral services related the core offer
- Online peripheral services related to the core offer
- On-site peripheral services not related to Art

PERSON
Audience engagement

- Trigers for a central engagement
  - Simple participation
  - Co-Construction
  - When public becomes artist
- Trigers for a peripheral engagement during the exhibition
- Audience engagement beyond the exhibition
  - on social networks
  - supportive behavior (volunteering, patronage...)