Local/Global: Mapping London's Art Market

Pamela Fletcher and Anne Helmreich
with David Israel and Seth Erickson

I.   Overview

Our online article "Local/Global: Mapping Nineteenth-Century London's Art Market"[14] explores the dialogue between the local and the global art markets that established a distinctive dynamic for the art world as experienced in London. Our analysis derives from two complementary datasets and visualizations. The first is an interactive map plotting the locations of major London commercial art galleries between 1850 and 1914, authored by Pamela Fletcher and David Israel. The second is an analysis by Anne Helmreich, with the assistance of Seth Erickson, of sales data drawn from the stock books of Goupil & Cie and its successor Boussod, Valadon & Cie, which cover transactions at the firm's various branches located in Paris, London, The Hague, Berlin, Brussels, and New York during the years 1846–1919. The map exists as a stand-alone research resource, hosted by Bowdoin College, whereas the network visualizations were produced solely for the purposes of this research inquiry.

II.   Research Questions and Secondary Literature

We chose to combine these two analytical fields—the geography of the London art market and the social and financial network of a retail firm situated within that landscape—as a first step toward our larger goal of representing—or perhaps more accurately, modeling—the London art market. Our intent was to offer new approaches to the study of the London art world, which we conceptualize as a set of pluralistic and elastic possibilities rather than a market that was rigidly codified by institutional bodies such as the Royal Academy. The article grew out of our collabo-

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14   See http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/index.php/autumn12/fletcher-helmreich-mapping-the-london-art-market

rative work on the nineteenth-century art market over the past ten years. This work is part of the ongoing revision of the paradigms of the nineteenth-century art market established by Harrison C. White and Cynthia A. White's ground-breaking study Canvases and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World, first published in 1965. Their pioneering work has been built upon, modified, and challenged in recent decades. Across this scholarship there is a broad consensus on the basic transformations that took place during the period: the relative loss of significance of state-sanctioned academies and the increasing importance of commercial art dealers and galleries. The details and significance of this trajectory, however, are subject to considerable debate.

Recognizing that frameworks derived from the French art market were ill suited to that of Great Britain, historians of British art have been working to establish an accurate historical record of the British market and to develop analytical interpretations that reveal its rich complexity and significance. Recent studies definitively establish that the British art market, particularly as located in London, was shaped by distinctive conditions, including the new wealth created by Britain's rapid industrialization, the strong Protestant predilections of many leading art collectors, the rise of theories justifying the commodification of art, and the tightly-knit, often overlapping, and mutually supportive social circles of artists, critics, dealers, and collectors.[15]

With the exception of the work of Thomas Bayer and John R. Page, scholars of the British art market have generally adopted the case-study approach, using carefully selected examples from which to draw broader conclusions. Given the sheer quantities of data involved, drawn from the thousands of exhibition catalogues, auction records, dealers' stock books, collectors' inventories, and press accounts that detail the daily workings of the market, case study analyses of individual dealers, artists, galleries, or patrons are a strategic response. Yet some questions cannot be answered—or even posed—without using larger datasets and finding ways to effectively mine and visualize the material they contain. Our two projects—and the article linking them—are our attempts to use these larger datasets and digital and computational methods together in order to better understand the larger cultural field of the nineteenth-century art market.

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15   These studies range from Dianne Sachko Macleod's pioneering study of patronage, Art and the Victorian Middle Class: Money and the Making of Cultural Identity (1996), to the more recent investigations of Thomas M. Bayer and John R. Page, The Development of the Art Market in England: Money as Muse, 1730–1900 (2011) and the authors in our anthology, The Rise of the Modern Art Market in London, 1850-1939 (2011).

III.   Approach and Outcomes

Fletcher's research project began with a set of questions about the reception of works of art in nineteenth-century London: where did people encounter works of art, and how did the physical and social circumstances of those encounters shape their responses? Understanding the exhibition culture of Victorian London requires accounting for not only the well-documented institutions of the Royal Academy and other artists' societies, but also the many smaller commercial spaces that sprang up across London's landscape in the second half of the century and eventually transformed the market for art.

Information about these individual galleries is scattered across very different kinds of archives. (The current project drew upon four major sources: the extensive collection of nineteenth-century exhibition catalogues at the National Art Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London; reviews and advertisements in the periodical press; the exhibition and event listings compiled annually by the journal The Year's Art; and, to a lesser extent, collections of letters between artists and dealers in the collections of the National Art Library and the Getty Research Institute.) It quickly became clear that a single narrative history of the emergence and consolidation of the gallery system could not contain or account for the sheer quantity of the data and its fragmented nature.

Digital mapping offered a solution to this intellectual impasse, allowing for the organization and visualization of large amounts of data across both space and time. The interactive map that is the heart of the website The London Gallery Project plots the locations of commercial galleries across London's West End from 1850 to 1914.[16] It charts the patterns of their geographical distribution and movement over time and in relation to other types of spaces, namely exhibition societies, artists' residences, and other retail venues. The animated timeline reveals the basic history of the form, as galleries slowly began to dot the West End landscape in the 1850s and 1860s before greatly increasing in numbers in the 1880s, particularly along Bond Street. The patterns visible on the map also quickly suggested new avenues of inquiry to us. For example, the map reveals geographic patterns of clustering, affiliation, and distinction emerging over the decades. The Royal Academy, as well as very successful commercial galleries such as The Fine Art Society and the Grosvenor Gallery, exerted a kind of gravitational pull, as new galleries aspired to emulate them and to reach their high-end audiences. A geographic language of distinction

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16   Pamela Fletcher and David N. Israel, The London Gallery Project, 2007; Revised September 2012.
      http://learn.bowdoin.edu/fletcher/london-gallery/

also emerged, as galleries used geographic distance or proximity to signal aesthetic distinction or affinity, in the now familiar cultural geography of center and (ever-changing) periphery. The resultant clustering in one central area also calls attention to a new shared identity of "a Bond Street gallery" as galleries and dealers shaped the norms of the gallery system, including gallery brand names and specializations, rotating exhibitions that filled in the annual calendar, one-man shows, exhibition catalogues, and advertising.[17]

Helmreich began investigating the history of the Goupil Gallery as part of a larger project on the role played by London in the internationalization of the art market over the course of the second half of the nineteenth century. The stock books of Goupil & Cie/Boussod, Valadon & Cie, now held by the Getty Research Institute, are invaluable records for writing that history, since the Paris-based firm established a branch in London beginning in 1857. While likely to be an incomplete record of the firm's activities on an international scale, since the individual branches also kept their own stock books and considered aspects of their business autonomous from the main house, these stock books nonetheless constitute an unparalleled record. The fifteen volumes cover the years from 1854 to 1919 and include more than 40,000 records.[18]

Analyzing these thousands upon thousands of transactions is difficult with traditional art-historical methodologies, which are arguably better suited for the investigation of individual or small groupings of artworks and/or artists, because they privilege "close reading." To study the whole of the Goupil & Cie/Boussod, Valadon & Cie network requires a different intellectual framework: what literary scholar Frank Moretti has described as "distant reading," which allows the scholar to look at "units that are much larger or smaller than the text." Moretti adds that "if we want to understand the system in its entirety, we must accept losing something," but justifies this loss by pointing out how distant reading holds the promise, by allowing a larger corpus than before to be studied, of producing analyses "that go against the grain of national historiography."[19]

We asked ourselves how to achieve this distant view, how to shift from the individual transaction

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17 These scholarly arguments based on the map were also published in traditional print formats, for example: Pamela Fletcher, "The Grand Tour on Bond Street: Cosmopolitanism and the Commercial Art Gallery in Victorian London," Visual Culture in Britain 12 no. 2 (July 2011): 139-152; and "Shopping for Art: The Rise of the Commercial Art Gallery, 1850s-1890s," in The Rise of the Modern Art Market in London, 1850-1939, ed. Pamela Fletcher and Anne Helmreich. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2011. 47-64.

18 See the essay by Cuadra and Penot in this volume on preparing the Goupil & Cie/Boussod, Valadon & Cie data- base that is publicly available via the Getty Research Institute.

19 Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," New Left Review 1 (January- February 2000), 61.

in order to analyze the behavior and history of a network and the strategies embedded within it. To answer these questions, Helmreich turned to the methodology of network analysis. To adopt this methodology requires conceptualizing the market as a triadic relationship between artist, buyer, and art dealer. The transaction—the act of consigning, exchanging, selling, or buying a work of art—forms the links between these agents. The artist sells or consigns the work of art to the art dealer, thus establishing a relationship, and the buyer acquires the work of art (or exchanges one work for another or sells back to the dealer), establishing yet another relationship. In the language of network analysis, the artist, buyer, and dealer are nodes and the transactions are edges or ties.

This methodology revealed a number of invaluable insights, which we discussed in our article, including relationships between artists and patrons and between artists and particular branches within the firm's corporate network, and the relative significance of branches. Perhaps the most surprising discovery was that the London branch of Goupil outstripped the other branches in transactions in 1883. Significantly, the network analysis could not explain why this happened— the method reveals patterns within the data, but it takes the researcher to interpret the significance of those patterns. The map provided a crucial piece of evidence for answering this question, as it reveals that in 1883 the London branch of Goupil moved to New Bond Street, in the heart of the luxury retail trade.

These visualizations of spatial and network analyses demonstrate that local and global markets are not really bounded or distinct, but rather are made up of different sets of overlapping and intersecting networks that artists accessed and activated in different ways. These possibilities both opened up the market—meaning there were multiple pathways for artistic success as measured in commercial terms—and also exerted pressure on artists seeking to steer a course through this dense and rapidly changing landscape.

IV. Collaborators and Process

The process of making a scholarly argument using digital humanities methods is a relatively new one for art historians. Therefore, as part of our article, we provided narratives describing how our projects developed, as well as lessons learned that could benefit the broader field.[20] Below

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20 In deriving these lessons learned, we closely followed the model of the Interim Report of the Online Scholarly Catalogue Initiative of the Getty Foundation: http://www.getty.edu/foundation/initiatives/current/osci/osci_report. html.

are modified excerpts from this section of our article; for a fuller account, please see http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/autumn12/fletcher-helmreich-mapping-the-london-art-market#about.

V.   Project Narratives

The Map (Pamela Fletcher): We chose to use ERSI's ArcGIS for pragmatic reasons: in the 1990s and 2000s, GIS was increasingly visible in historical scholarship and there was thus available funding and technical support for humanities scholars to use it. In the summer of 2005, David Israel, Bowdoin student Karen Fossum, and I received a grant from the National Institute for Technology in Liberal Education (NITLE) to attend a "GIS at NITLE Student Immersion/ Faculty Focus workshop" at Middlebury College, which was led by Diana Stinton. The Gibbons Summer Research Internship Fund at Bowdoin sponsored Karen's work on the project for the rest of that summer.

Pamela Fletcher and David Israel, *London Gallery Project*, 2007, revised 2012. The map above is stored on a server at Bowdoin.edu, http://learn.bowdoin.edu/fletcher/london-gallery/. An archived version of the map as of 22 October 2012 is available at http://19thc-artworldwide.org/fletcher/london-gallery/.

The interactive map and website were built in 2007 with the final data entered in the summer of 2012. The first part of the project involved mapping all the data points in GIS; the second step was creating the animated map. As many scholars have noted, one major limit of GIS is how it handles change over time, a primary concern of historians and art historians. Because modes of mapping time in GIS were inadequate when this project launched in 2007, we chose to animate the map using Flash. Many members of Bowdoin's Information Technology department contributed to the project at this stage. Israel conceived of the overall structure of the timeline, and designed and built the website within which the map is viewed. Tad Macy converted data into XML that could be consumed by the ActionScript to provide geographical coordinates, as well as gallery names, dates, and addresses, in the Flash multimedia platform for display on the website. He also revised and wrote new code in ActionScript to control the sliders on the map, and set the placement of map coordinates. Kevin Travers assembled the map's interface as a timeline in Flash, which allows for the incremental animation of the data and overlays. And, finally, in 2012, Israel added information to each individual data point represented in the gallery layer of the map.

Network Analysis (Anne Helmreich): To learn the basic concepts associated with network analysis, I participated in the National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute on Advanced Topics in the Digital Humanities, dedicated to Networks and Network Analysis, led by Timothy Tangherlini, University of California, Los Angeles, in August 2010. My initial prototype was built using *ORA, a network analysis tool developed by Computational Analysis of Social and Organizational Systems at Carnegie Mellon University. The data was drawn from Goupil & Cie/Boussod, Valadon & Cie database that had been completed by the Provenance Index team at the Getty Research Institute (GRI).[21]
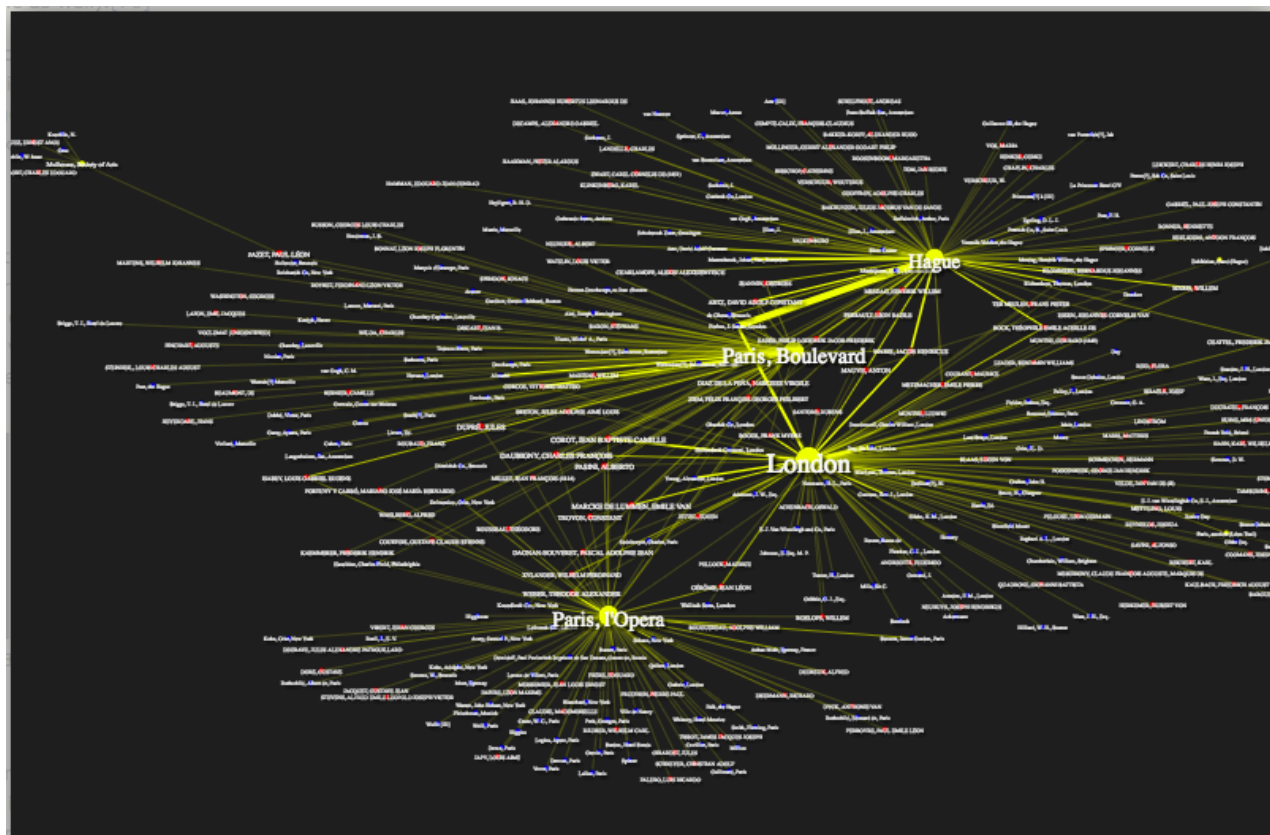
Goupil & Cie network, 1883, betweenness centrality measured.

As I worked with the data, a number of problems arose stemming from the fact that the database was created as a transcription of handwritten stock books. For the "artist" field, this problem was rectified when the database was created by validating the names against the Getty Provenance Index's authority list of artist names, but the sales location field and patron field, for example, still contained multiple variants. With the consultation and support of UCLA PhD student Seth Erickson, a name authority for the sales location field was created and spelling of patrons' names rectified.

Erickson, building on his expertise in information science and online publishing, then developed a command-line script, written in Ruby, to extract the relevant fields from an excel spreadsheet that was created from the GRI's database, to standardize the data, and to prepare them for ingestion into network analysis software program.[22] For the published version, I switched from *ORA to Gephi because Gephi is an open-source program supported by a large development community, and I hoped to benefit from the ongoing improvement of key features and the addition of new ones over time. In early August 2012, I consulted with digital humanist Elijah Meeks to identify the best means of publishing the graphs derived from Gephi, and to explore the analytical capacities of Gephi and how these might be best deployed for this project.[23]

VI.   Lessons Learned

1. Digital scholarship requires an extensive time commitment.

2. Digital scholarship rests on data standardization: Historical data that is often idiosyncratic, ambiguous, or incomplete, and standardizing the data is both time-consuming and an act of interpretation in its own right.

3. Digital scholarship revises traditional publishing workflows: The content of digital projects is often inseparable from their formats and thus all options viable for the intended publisher must be considered at the outset of the project.

4. Collaboration is crucial for success: Creating the conditions for scholars and experts in data management, database construction, programming and web design and development (to name just a few relevant domains) to come together as equals is critical to the intellectual success of digital projects.

5. Rethink traditional models of authorship: In varying degrees, the processes of data standardization, interpretation, and visualization upon which these arguments are based were larger collaborative efforts involving many other contributors. The project narrative statement is thus an essential component of this publication, as it attributes and acknowledges the diverse contributions of our colleagues.

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21   Christian Huemer, (Project for the Study of Collecting and Provenance, GRI), planned and supervised the production of the database. Ruth Cuadra, (Application Systems Analyst, GRI), was responsible for structuring the database and its web interface; independent scholar Agnes Penot transcribed the stock-book information.

22   For a fuller account of this process, please see the relevant section of "About this Project": http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/autumn12/fletcher-helmreich-mapping-the-london-art-market#about.

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6. Digital scholarship is a form of scholarly interpretation: The data-heavy aspect of digital projects may obscure the fact that this work rests on acts of interpretation distributed throughout the entire process, from deciphering nineteenth-century script to selecting, modeling, and presenting the data. At times our interpretation was shaped by computational and database requirements ill-suited to the ambiguity that often characterizes the primary source material used by humanists. For example, the data structure underlying the mapping project required a precise starting and ending date for each gallery's tenure at a given address, but sometimes the archive does not provide definitive clarity on such information. The database underlying the network visualizations required a uniform name for each sales location for the purposes of clustering the data, but the archive used multiple nomenclatures. Both the methods and results of digital humanities projects should be understood as scholarly interpretations, and thus of a piece with long-standing practices in the humanities.

7. Reconsider traditional models of scholarly argument: Our argument in the article is not limited to the text, but is also embedded in the map and visualizations.