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Art On/Offshore:

The Singapore Freeport and Narrative Economics that Frame the Southeast Asian Art Market

OFFSHOREART.CO (KATHLEEN DITZIG AND ROBIN LYNCH)

Abstract

Through an examination of the evolution of the representation of the Singapore Freeport over the last 10 years, this paper maps the speculative discourse in 2014 around the Singapore Freeport as a one-stop shop of art services that could theoretically lend to the growth of Southeast Asian art market to the associative effects of the Bouvier Affair. This paper demonstrates the importance of narrative economics and cultural policy in the success of art infrastructure such as the Singapore Freeport, and their referencing, however vaguely, the Southeast Asia art market.

In June 2020, *The Business Times* reported that Swiss art dealer Yves Bouvier was suing a group of businessmen for reneging on a deal to buy the Singapore Freeport (also known as Le Freeport).¹ It was reported that Bouvier had been trying to sell the Freeport since 2017, and that as of 2018 it had accumulated S\$18.4 million in losses, as well as an outstanding debt to DBS Group of S\$20 million. In recent years, and ever since the Bouvier Affair, the Singapore Freeport has been plagued by less than ideal press. This has been a turnaround from the overtly positive if not empowering narratives that spoke of

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its role in constructing the Southeast Asian art market as well as its lauded alchemic power as a haven for ‘duty-free’ art that could drive up the value of artworks.²

This marked change in the discourse around the Singapore Freeport and the increased legal scrutiny over it have revealed a number of interesting factors that determine the efficiency of art infrastructure: Firstly, narrative economics³ can drive the perceived success and value of art infrastructure, and these narratives are in part divined by the affirmation of a moral code for art. Secondly, without narrative economics and the belief in the moral sanctity of the art infrastructure being used, the networks of art infrastructure begin to break down. In turn, those who are empowered by the making and facilitation of networks that move art (or at least the appearance of such) become less powerful.

Since the Bouvier Affair, a number of books and investigative projects have sought to uncover the relationships and networks that lent to Dmitry Rybolovlev suing Yves Bouvier for fraud in misrepresenting and overcharging him for a number of artworks. These projects have focused on bringing transparency to the contemporary art market. This paper, however, focuses on the relationship of the Singapore Freeport and the upper echelons of the wealthy elite of the art world, who are not directly related to the Southeast Asian art market that it presumably serves with an imagination of it. In beginning with a reference to a June 2020 report of a failed deal to sell the Freeport, this paper examines the development of how the Singapore Freeport has been discussed in relation to the Southeast Asian art market at its peak and as exemplified by reports by firms such as Deloitte. In unpacking the evolution of the Singapore Freeport over the last 10 years, through secondary sources, and an interview with Ryan Su, an art lawyer familiar with the Singapore Freeport, this paper illustrates how it evidences the art world as a “quasi-financial regime” that is at the confluence of a global and postcolonial history of economic development that brings together the state, foreign investment, and the imagination of Southeast Asia as an emergent art market with the imagined development of Singapore’s art scene. The Singapore Freeport is a space in which cultural funding and finance once intersected and whose influence has been based on the narrative economics it can generate.

In proving such an illustration, this paper thus offers a re-reading of how the mechanisms of power in the art system are based on similar mechanics that operate in the offshore world. Power is not so much determined by control but by being in the best position to take advantage of opportunities, of creating networks and value chains. Moreover, state systems are deeply

implicated in this, if not operationalised by this. Narrative economics in turn play a defining role in this process. In turn, this paper also provides a lens to rethinking how regional art markets and, by extension, their art worlds can be decolonized. Moreover, suggesting the agency of artworks to contribute to narrative economics that can effect change.

The Singapore Freeport

Established in 2010, the Singapore Freeport is an art and private wealth logistics hub, strategically located within the Airport Logistics Park of Singapore (ALPS) at Changi Airport. One of Singapore's nine Free Trade Zones (FTZ), ALPS is a 26-hectare zone with warehouses and seamless access to Changi Airfreight Centre. In theory, one could go straight from a private plane to the Singapore Freeport without leaving the airport. The Singapore Freeport benefits from being part of a free zone. It is the largest freeport in the world dedicated to the storage of fine art and collectibles and the first in Asia. It is owned by the company Le Freeport, with Swiss shareholders and founders such as Yves Bouvier—the former owner of Natural Le Coultre, the Singapore Freeport's principle tenant—and Alain Vandenborre.⁴ The Singapore Freeport is allowed its tax- and customs-free status due to its location within ALPS. Officially opened in 2003, ALPS is the first logistic park with FTZ status, combining one form of global infrastructure, the logistics park, with the FTZ. Branded as 'future-ready' infrastructure, it was developed to allow third-party logistics service providers to export and distribute goods from local and regional manufacturers to the Asia-Pacific market in a cost-effective and timely manner.⁵

Although ALPS has been conceived as part of a 'future-ready' strategy, it draws on a lengthy history of the usage of FTZs. FTZs are by no means a new phenomenon and have played a major role in trading history. These zones are strategic and important landmarks for the countries in whose peripheries they exist, as well as being key players for other nations within a global framework. The FTZ allows a blurring of state and judicial boundaries. The establishment of Le Freeport within Singapore is largely due to this long history of developing friendly external trade and FTZs.⁶ It is worthy to note that the Singapore government did not invite Natural Le Coultre to set up the Singapore Freeport. Rather, the founders had sought the support of the government. Compared to Le Freeport's initial base in Geneva, Singapore's laws are much more lenient and investor-friendly. Natural Le Coultre's interest grew after Swiss regulatory and tax reforms in 2005. Prompted by scandal and foreign criminal cases involving the trafficking of stolen works, Switzerland

enacted strict federal legislation based on a 1970 UNESCO international convention against the trafficking of art and antiquities.⁷ Thus much of the freedom afforded by the Swiss legislations eroded, making the Geneva base less appealing in theory. Singapore, by comparison, opted out of the UNESCO convention in 1985 and chose not to sign the 1995 international agreement on the repatriation of stolen or illegally exported cultural goods. When Switzerland began to withhold tax on non-resident accounts owned by Europeans, Alain Vandenborre claims that this move towards increased regulation inspired the idea of the Freeport in Singapore.⁸ Thus the Singapore Freeport was established due in part to Singapore being a friendly foreign investment zone and a hub of international activity.

Aside from the numerous benefits granted by Singapore being a friendly zone, the Freeport has additional exceptions for luxury goods and art. The Freeport enjoys FTZ status, with artwork stored there exempt from Goods and Services Tax (GST), which would normally be levied at a rate of 7 per cent. Tax exemptions have made it even more appealing by allowing the contents of the Freeport to travel temporarily to museums in Singapore for exhibition without incurring duties or taxes. Leveraging a dual opportunity, it allows museums in Singapore to have access to valuable artworks and cultural artefacts. The Freeport when it first opened also created an ideal environment for dealing and collecting through more lenient tax laws and setting up world-class logistics handlers such as Christies and MalcaAmit as the principle tenants and intermediaries between the Freeport and its users. Goods in the Freeport can sit in transit indefinitely without entering the country, with no duty levied and no estimated VAT deposited until the goods leave the FTZ.

As a further benefit, the Freeport set itself up as a secure and confidential facility. In linking back to its founding moment as a reaction to the tightening of Swiss legal laws, the Freeport's confidentiality and security have been compared to that of Swiss banks. As one of the founders of the Singapore Freeport told the *Wall Street Journal* when the facility opened,

When you go to a bank and rent a safe, nobody knows what goes in. It's the same thing here.... They only need to give a code that indicates the broad nature of the item—gold, wine or a painting. There's no value, no ownership, no inventory list—all details are confidential. We offer more confidentiality than Geneva.⁹

However, while the secrecy of the Freeport has been the linchpin of many speculative readings of its ability to increase the value of artworks, local art

lawyer and scholar Ryan Su believes that the Freeport's primary appeal is that it provided specialist services that were not reliably available for private use. Su emphasizes the appeal and importance of specialized art storage with climate control and security that ensured artworks would not be stolen. In particular, Su mentions the particular importance of the former in Singapore's humid climate and notes that even with the state-of-the-art security system that the Freeport provides, collectors are still required to purchase insurance for storing their art.¹⁰ Security and secrecy are often the paramount reasons touted by the Singapore Freeport for why collectors or institutions should use their facilities. In reality, the needs and functions for a local user are more prosaic. Su further speculates that the development of the freeport is more evidence of the growth of an auxiliary service industry that supports the ownership of art and derives fees from the maintenance of and risk management around owning art.

The Freeport and the State: Singapore Freeport and Cultural Policy

While for local users, the Singapore Freeport may provide for more prosaic needs, lawyers and market specialists have noted that setting up freeport areas is one of the strategies adopted in the competition of becoming "Asia's art-market hub".¹¹ A 2016 UN report on free ports and art noted that "there are several tens of free ports in the world and in Europe (more than forty in the European Union and over ten in Switzerland). Five of them have specialized in stocking works of art. The oldest, founded in 1850, is the free port of Geneva, Switzerland; the second was created in 2010 in Singapore [it was also the first in Asia]; another one in 2013 in Monaco; while the two most recent ones opened during summer 2014 in Beijing and Luxemburg."¹² The development of the Singapore Freeport, being a project deeply ingrained in the Singapore state as part of its narratives and projections of Singapore as a global city, is no surprise. The Freeport's website itself declares that "Singapore rapidly enacted regulations necessary to optimally operate a Freeport."¹³ The Freeport's day-to-day operations are made possible because of the support of the Singapore customs, the Singapore police, the Civil Aviation Authority and the Economic Development Board. Furthermore, at the time of its establishment, the National Arts Council and the National Heritage Board each held a 5 per cent stake in the corporation.¹⁴ The state divested itself of its holdings in the company in 2011. Thus, being 'outside' of the 'jurisdiction' of Singapore, it is nevertheless also inherently a project supported by the Singapore state. It is important to note that the financial and art connections that the Freeport primarily fosters are oriented towards

an external market, rather than to Singapore's own local art scene. The primary purpose of FTZs, while certainly very economically beneficial for their host state, is to aid and facilitate the flow of trade internationally. The Freeport's function continues the history of FTZs and the fostering of international finance and exchange through honing Singapore as a friendly and efficient nexus point. Just as ALPS (Airport Logistics Park of Singapore) is positioned as a 'future-ready' technology, the Freeport has a similar strategic reasoning in the construction of future trade for Singapore. This logic builds on the already established history of FTZs, but it also branches from the vested image of the arts and creativity as an economic tool, heavily planned and developed by the state from 2000.¹⁵

In addition to the FTZs and freeports, C.J. W.L. Wee in *The Asian Modern, Culture, Capitalist Development* (2007) has astutely pointed out that Singapore has strategically, through its policy, fashioned itself to be a very welcoming place for international business and finance, rapidly becoming one of the busiest places for external trade. By honing itself as a nexus that allows for this kind of flexible movement, Singapore has positioned itself quite competitively in a more global framework. The Singapore Freeport was perhaps facilitated by state support because of its implicit promise in developing Singapore's art economy. As more professionals and companies are on the move to create international connections, the capacity to attract talent or put a city on the global map is often considered essential to the economy of a region. The drive to promote Singapore as a global city for the arts and a creative city for nomadic capital was a move to become internationally competitive, 'future-ready' and resilient. Just as art has become an asset for individual investors to diversify their portfolio and resist the thrashings of the market, the arts offer Singapore the same promise of a diversified economy and workforce to withstand the volatile international market.¹⁶

Singapore Freeport and Its (Supposed) Networked Ecologies

It is important to note that part of why the Freeport figures into an imagination of Singapore as a global city is because the Freeport facilitates the movement of artwork by creating an ecology of institutional, logistical, infrastructural and personal connections that allow transactions to occur and are hospitable to developing business. It is no coincidence, for example, that the Freeport was linked to the regional art fair, Art Stage Singapore. In the May 2010 edition of the German magazine *Kunstzeitung*, Claudia Dias would account how "thanks to the new Freeport and Singapore's substantial subsidies, the ink is hardly dry on the promotional materials for Art Stage

Singapore”.¹⁷ In one simple statement, the Freeport was connected to the new state-facilitated art fair, drawing out an evident potential value chain for future investors and dealers.

The Freeport’s relationship with other forms of infrastructure is not limited to the art fair. The Pinacothèque Singapore, opened in 2015, was partially owned and funded by Le Freeport. Art Heritage Singapore, the company that ran the Singapore Pinacothèque, was a partnership between Marc Restellini, founder of the original Pinacothèque in Paris, and the primary owners of the Singapore Freeport, Vandenborre and Bouvier.¹⁸ The Pinacothèque was a museum, which primarily showcased Western blue-chip art on loan from collectors around the world. (However, shortly after the Singapore Freeport was established, and the Singapore Pinacothèque was set up, the Paris institution declared bankruptcy and that it was moving all of its assets to Singapore.¹⁹) Yves Bouvier was reported as encouraging the museum to set up in Singapore.²⁰ This suggests a link between the tax-lenient exhibition laws, the perfect logistics environment for storing and selling artworks, and an exclusive for-profit collector museum. In an interview with *Blouin Art Info*, Restellini said that Singapore’s location will make it easier for Pinacothèque’s Asian collectors to loan artworks to the Asian branch of the museum, pointing to yet another network-creating mechanism in relation to the Freeport.²¹ The same article also noted that support to establish the museum came from the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) and the National Parks Board (NParks), once again linking the private project to the state.

Yves Bouvier ran Natural Le Coultre from 1997 to 2017, when he sold the company. He had built a reputation for creating dynamic clusters such as this, for trading, maintaining and moving art. The French press even called it “the Bouvier model”—a business strategy of creating artistic hubs wherein facilities for rent and specific services dedicated to art collectors, museums and companies are grouped within a freeport.²² According to the *New Yorker*, by 2016 Natural Le Coultre had rented more than 20,000 square metres in storage space and had held well over a million objects in its care around the world.²³ Termed the “quiet butlers of the art world”, companies like Bouvier’s operate in the art world but are not quite part of its ecology.²⁴ To do their work, these handlers are given records of private sales and the names of collectors in order to navigate customs. In many sense, operators such as Bouvier embody the “free agent” ideal described by Boltanski and Chiapello.²⁵

The Bouvier model of working as a free agent able to create connections demonstrates that freeports are not obscured processes but are based on networks and the information they produce, as well as the ability of an individual to leverage that information. This is actually far more complicated.

The ability to line up a supply chain or a value chain that connects buyer to seller with nodal points like museums and art fairs in order to create ‘value’ is not based merely on a free agent. How the Bouvier model would come to be undone by narratives spawned by the Bouvier Affair is evidence of this. However, it did not begin to unfold till 2015. From the opening of the Singapore Freeport till the Bouvier Affair in 2015, the Bouvier model was lauded and correlated with the logic of making Singapore a global arts city. Making Singapore a conduit for the region’s art markets was correlative to the Singapore Freeport being a one-stop shop in an expanded network for the art collector.

2014: Singapore Freeport and the Imaginations of Southeast Asia as an Emergent Art Market

Whereas the reports of June 2020 cited above indicated troubled times for the Singapore Freeport, the facility would certainly not have been difficult to sell at its peak, six years prior in 2014. The freeport can create connections that in turn ‘create’ the appearance of markets. The 2014 Deloitte and ArtTactic’s Art and Finance Report noted that the Southeast Asian art market had been “registered since 2009”, meaning in effect that it had come into being or became apparent only in 2009.²⁶ Basing this claim on the Southeast Asian art market’s potential for growth corresponding with the rapid regional growth of the Ultra-high-net-worth individual (UNHWI) population, as well as Singapore’s position as a financial and art market hub, the report noted Singapore’s investment in art infrastructure, specifically the Freeport, as being particularly important to the rise of a Southeast Asian art market.

It is no surprise that of all the art infrastructure that Singapore is known to have produced and which have implications for Southeast Asia as a regional market—including a number of public museums such as the National Gallery Singapore and the Heritage Conservation Center—the Freeport figured most prominently in Deloitte’s formulation of the growth of the Southeast Asian art market. Freeports have received considerable attention in relationship to their function as value-creating mechanisms for artwork.²⁷ Freeports create and tap into pre-existing infrastructure, building multi-jurisdictional and institutional value chains for artworks and luxury goods.

Throughout their history, freeports have been harnessed as vital market hubs, forming important nexus points for trade and finance flows. In order to understand how a freeport can figure into a discussion of the Southeast Asian market as Deloitte had once imagined, it is important to first understand how the freeport itself works. Freeports, in general, are special customs

areas in which customs regulations are generally less strict or for which there are no customs duties. Aside from their focus on art, luxury goods and collectibles, freeports are by no means a new innovation. Freeports build on a pre-existing phenomena: the Free Trade Zone (FTZ), which has historically been deeply colonial and played a major role in establishing economic and trade power. Through its lucrative status as a granter of economic and mobile freedom, FTZs have become a beacon for international corporations and trade, facilitating an increasingly internationalised world of free trade. Established within FTZs, freeports are similarly becoming a staple of international art market trade flows. Their rising influence is aided by the strategic selection of freeport locations, which are often established in areas of significant finance and trade such as Singapore. Generally speaking, although each freeport varies slightly in terms of its jurisdictional arrangement with the state within which it exists, all art and collectibles within the freeport are not taxed, nor are sales within the freeport itself. Lending to their appeal, freeports actively promote and establish themselves as logistics hubs across jurisdictions, institutions and networks.

Rooted in colonial history, many zones were formed in the beginning of the 17th century along major trade routes to facilitate global exchange along convenient nodes like Hong Kong, Singapore and the Caribbean.²⁸ The zone developed into an area where goods could be stored and held without fees. FTZs help boost exports, create jobs and attract large corporations to establish footholds in rapidly growing markets. Architect and theorist Keller Easterling describes them as

[A] highly contagious and globalized urban form and a vivid vessel of [what Easterling] termed extrastatecraft. A portmanteau meaning both outside of and in addition to statecraft...the zone—a.k.a., the Free trade Zone, Foreign Trade Zone, Special Economic Zone, Export Processing Zone, or any of the dozen variants—is a dynamic crossroads of trade, finance, management and communication.²⁹

As intensive concentrators of trade, finance and logistics, FTZs have become an important economic development tool in Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America.³⁰ While economic enclaves such as FTZs have their roots in the special treaty ports and customs areas of Western colonialism, the contemporary proliferation of FTZs is tied to projects of national development during the Cold War and after World War II.³¹ Prompted by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and the World Bank as a solution to Third World Debt, the development of such zones was part of a strategy to

improve upon or replace export-substitution industrialization in developing countries by giving foreign investors incentives to set up factories that produce export goods, train low-skill workers and facilitate technological transfer so as to pursue foreign exchange earnings. From the 1970s, the UN and World Bank promoted the export-processing zone throughout Asia, the Middle East and Latin America, lending to the proliferations of such zones.³²

In this regard, it is important to note that FTZs were not necessarily externally imposed upon Singapore and other postcolonial nations. Singapore was established as a free port by Sir Stamford Raffles in 1819 when, instead of taxing shipping traffic, opium and drugs were taxed. As business historians Geoffrey Jones and Jean-Jacques Van Helten have written, this was important in the development of Singapore as a base from which British enterprise spread out into neighbouring regions and consolidated its influence in the East:

Singapore's excellent harbour and sheltered anchorage, its nodal position at the tip of the Malay Peninsula, and the policy originated by Raffles that it should be a free port were key factors in the [expansion of British enterprise in Southeast Asia and China in the nineteenth century]... After the 1870s Singapore's growth accelerated as the economic development of surrounding areas, and especially of its natural hinterland of Malaya, enhanced the port's position. Meanwhile, the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 made Singapore the focal point of steamship lines along the route between Suez and Shanghai. Singapore's foreign trade... expanded over nine times between 1870 and 1913.³³

Jones and Van Helten go on to claim that these same factors encouraged Singapore's growth as a trading centre by attracting British agency houses (which after the great rubber boom of 1905 diversified into primary commodity production) and being the initial location of the British overseas banks such as The Oriental Bank Corporation, which established its first branch at the port in 1846. Infrastructure investments, such as the government building of railways and roads, and activities, such as irrigation works, agricultural loans and the promotion of labour migration to Malaya, attracted foreign capital to the country and opened it up to the world market. Conglomerates, such as PSA (Port of Singapore Authority), serve as postcolonial counterparts of the old British East India Company franchises, picking up the routes and facilitating trade through such infrastructures as the freeport from their colonial predecessors.

To understand the political stakes of this history, it is important to note that the development of FTZs out of colonial-era port cities was not a linear progression but one marked by the fall of Western empires in the aftermath of WWII. The fall of empires meant that trading networks that connected Shanghai to Malacca, Calcutta to Colombo, collapsed and the trading hubs they supported declined.³⁴ A post-WWII landscape rewrote trade flows through new national boundaries. In the earlier years of national development, many new leaders across the Global South and the Third World saw political sovereignty as interdependent with economic sovereignty.³⁵ Countries that feared Chinese communism and domestic insurgency were less likely to see the West as a threat and created special economic zones to facilitate trade with it.

After WWII, Singapore's former prospects as a regional entrepôt were diminished. Its significance in the region—in part assured by the business of its entrepôt trade and the British military base—was challenged by neighbouring countries that had developed competing ports and by the British pulling out of Singapore in the 1960s. Singapore would later turn to the United States to establish a military base and profit from the business and aid that would come with its containment policy in Southeast Asia and the Vietnam War.³⁶ Singapore's first FTZ Parliamentary Act was passed in 1969 to develop Jurong Industrial Zone and set up its first FTZ at Jurong Port. After its separation from Malaysia and its independence in 1965, Singapore shifted its development strategy to export manufacturing spearheaded by foreign direct investment (FDI). From 1967 to 1969 Singapore expanded tax incentives, created industrial estates, passed labour legislation to improve industrial relations, and restructured the education system to emphasise technical education and industrial training.³⁷ The goal was to recuperate Singapore's status as a regional entropy and its associated benefits. To achieve this Singapore had to present itself as a regional hub, a global city easy to do business in. The inflow of FDI surged between 1968 and 1973 and rapid industrial and GDP growth ensued. By 1972, Singapore would declare itself a 'global city'³⁸—a rhetoric that would return throughout Singapore's cultural policy in the 1990s and early 2000s, as Singapore sought to build a renaissance city to attract foreign capital.

This logic of attracting foreign capital through FTZs was not an isolated policy. Beyond the FTZ, Singapore is an international banking facility (IBF), which is a stringent type of offshore centre. It created the Asian Currency Units (ACUs), in addition to Domestic Banking Units (DBU) in 1968, establishing itself as an IBF. ACUs, in contrast to DBUs, would be entirely dedicated to foreign financial units, facilitating exchange for international investors.

As Cold War conflicts of the 1960s grew, there was an increase in foreign exchange expenditure in the Asia-Pacific region in the mid-1960s, and a tightening of credit in 1967 and 1968 led to increased interest rates in the Eurodollar market. Singapore responded by setting up the ACUs as incentives for branches of international banks to relocate there. Setting up the ACUs, as Ronen Palan has described, was in a sense an early offshore financial market defined by strategic if not competitive use of regulation and taxation.³⁹

As such, when we speak of the freeport and FTZs in relation to Singapore as a global arts city, we must not forget that its connection to the international is one based on the routes and policies of consolidating influence that were already apparent with the British colonial enterprise and which were informed by Cold War dynamics.

Southeast Asia as Regional Market

Returning to the Deloitte and ArtTactic Art and Finance Report of 2014, it notes that the Southeast Asian art market was “registered [in] 2009”.⁴⁰ Through this historization, the report fails to credit the work of dealers prior to 2009, such as Valentine Willie in the early 2000s, and other market activities such as Sotheby’s inauguration of the first biannual sale of Southeast Asian art in Singapore in 1996. While the report claims to be a “barometer for the emerging art and finance industry”, we cannot escape the fact that the report is a form of marketing. Deloitte has been publishing its art and finance reports since 2011. This report is a particularly interesting cultural artefact because it evidences a shift in the global art market toward financialization, fitting art into the larger instruments of the finance industry.⁴¹ The globalisation of the art market evidenced in the growth of the auction houses and art fairs outside the West, alongside the financialization of the art market in the first decade of the 2000s as evidenced in the growth of art funds and other professional art investment vehicles, has served art collectors and investors investing in new “geoaesthetic regions” so as to diversify their collections/portfolios in order to spread risk.⁴² Within this frame, the investment managers and bankers are less interested in the art as art, but in the art as asset. Therefore, when Deloitte writes of the emergence of a Southeast Asian art market, it is not that the market is new but that the market is now sufficiently recognised as one such region to prospect and invest in.

What is the Southeast Asian art market, and what about this supposed transition to financialization is so important? The Deloitte report takes the region as a category to group a number of ‘national’ markets that do not inherently correspond with one another. A study commissioned by Artprice.

com, “Asian Art Market in the Time of Globalization”, found that the Asian and Western art markets remain profoundly separated from each other.⁴³ Artists sold in the individual Southeast Asian art markets (by country) tend to be overwhelmingly local, meaning that collectors buying in a specific market tend to be based in the country of that market and tend to buy artists also based in the country and market. For example, Indonesia, the most populous country in the region, saw 93 per cent of its auction turnover held by Indonesian artists and 5 per cent by Chinese, whereas artists of other nationalities account for only 2 per cent of all sales.⁴⁴ The report also found that some artists who gain international recognition by being represented by Western galleries, exhibiting in international biennials or museums, or having already recorded auction sales above the million-dollar mark, tend not to internationalise the local markets from which they originate or in which they are based, in terms of buying patterns. Thus a Southeast Asian market as a regional marketplace should not be taken at face value. There is no cohesive regional market; at least, there is no empirical data to support the existence of a cohesive regional market.⁴⁵

Interestingly enough, out of the Southeast Asian art markets, the only exception to a national domestic market as highlighted by Artprice was Singapore, which was defined as a trading place without a disproportionate focus on its local artists—indicative of a city where international buyers congregated to purchase works from rising regional artists.⁴⁶ Elucidating the significance of Singapore’s market behavioural exceptionalism, Wang Zineng notes in his article “Market Watch” for *Third Text* that “Singapore remains the only country within the region where public art museums organise pan-regional exhibits of Indonesian, Filipino, Thai and other Southeast Asian works. It is also the auction hub within the region... Nowhere else in Southeast Asia is regional consciousness translated into meaningful curatorial and art market engagements.”⁴⁷ Thus, suggesting that a cohesive Southeast Asian art market exists, it is one that Singapore imagines and is invested in.

Therefore, while the Freeport’s projected function in regard to Southeast Asia is one that does not fully align with the region’s ‘national’ art markets (in other words, markets wherein there is enough demand from local collectors collecting local art to sustain a ‘national’ market), it does, however, align with Singapore’s developed image as a point for international traffic and trade. The relationship between Singapore as an art market trading place and the Freeport as a definitive structure of a Southeast Asian art market is symbiotic. It gives the Freeport a unique placement within the construction of the Southeast Asian art market. As noted in a *Lufthansa* article, there is evidence of the Freeport being used by businesses in Asia looking to use the

its service when in Singapore to do business. “The movers and shakers of the Tokyo Gallery UG...use the freeport as a storage and showroom facility... gallery founder Eiichiro Sasaki... [states] “We primarily need the freeport for security reasons.”⁴⁸ The Bouvier model, being a one-stop shop business and one-stop resource freeport, projects the image of being the sole resource of services, centralising a region defined by separate, different and often nationally self-sufficient markets. With the original purpose of freeports being to serve as a location to defer financial formalities until such time as the art reaches its final destination, changing to serve capital accumulation arising out of their fiscal limbo, a freeport is an effective springboard for a trading centre such as Singapore, where an investment market can be consolidated from other emergent markets to appear like a regional market.

This is especially the case since the freeport addresses one of the shortcomings of art as an investment asset. With the exception of a few reports and art investment funds that push those reports, art is not recognised as a profitable financial asset due to the lack of liquidity and transparency of the market.⁴⁹ However, more studies and infrastructure have allowed for more intelligent decision-making or investing supported by auction data providers, art appraisers, legal service providers, insurance companies and art market researchers. In potentially streamlining the flow of assets of different markets and centralising the region’s solution to the security and care for its collections of cultural assets, the Freeport once promised an imagination of a Southeast Asian market for art, speculating a market into existence through the prospecting of wealth managers like Deloitte.⁵⁰

However, beyond wealth managers, this image of a Southeast Asian region converging through Singapore also appeals to the international art world. In a discussion on exodus, Virno distinguished frontier from border: “The border is a line at which one stops; the frontier is an indefinite area in which to proceed. The border is stable and fixed, the frontier mobile and uncertain. One is obstacle; the other is chance...the frontier is the presence of a boundless territory to colonise.”⁵¹ Southeast Asia, as imagined through the hub of the freeport or through Singapore, is not a border but rather a frontier, an emerging market whose area is open to new networks and to definition. *Art Market Intelligence: Southeast Asia*, an art market report published in 2017, describes the Southeast Asian art market as nascent, accounting for less than 1 percent of the global art market, according to Sotheby’s, and requiring more time to mature as a ‘concept’. The language in the report is specific in identifying the market as needing a narrative and it pinpoints Singapore as responsible for the region’s continued growth:

This long-term building task will largely fall on Singapore where at least three government agencies are engaged in developing a regional art ecosystem. Given the city state's deep pockets, and its track record for leapfrogging hurdles, expect the market to steadily grow, especially if the economy improves. Singapore can build a sustainable arts hub for the region.⁵²

The Freeport, as the site and proxy by which Singapore has been seen as an art city and an entrepôt in a globalised art world, is supported by Singapore's investment in a Southeast Asian art market. The state, in the form of the National Gallery Singapore, owns the largest public collection of Southeast Asian modern art in the world. C.J. W.L. Wee in *The Asian Modern, Culture, Capitalist Development*, has astutely pointed out that Singapore has strategically, through its policy, attuned itself to be a very welcoming place for international business and finance, aiding it to rapidly become one of the busiest places for external trade.⁵³ The Southeast Asian art market is no different. Initiatives by the government to develop Singapore as a global centre for arts, culture and entertainment through the Creative Industries policy and 2000–12 Renaissance City Plans (RCP) saw arts and culture as an economic strategy to develop Singapore into a place that attracts foreign investment and global capital. A tie to an emergent market that is yet to be defined and growing where other markets are in decline is equally attractive to wealth managers and cultural professionals.⁵⁴

However, what is interesting in parallel to this state imaginary or speculation on the Singapore Freeport, is that in some senses the Singapore Freeport was never really about Singapore or Southeast Asia. Bregman notes in one of her interviews that Andre Decrausaz, representative of Geneva Freeport, said:

What's interesting about Singapore is the Chinese... Because if the Chinese buy things today, and they bring them to China...there could be a change in government in two minutes...if I'm Chinese, and I buy a painting, I would never put it in China. I'd store it... and if ever I have an issue with the regime.... I leave China with a place to recuperate what I've bought.⁵⁵

News outlets reported that while the Singapore Freeport was originally expected to bolster Singapore's status as a wealth management hub, China's clampdown on luxury spending (part of Xi Jinping's 2014 crackdown on

corruption) and bank exits from the physical commodity business since 2014 had hurt the business.⁵⁶

Returning to the original point of scrutiny between Singapore, the freeport and the rise of a Southeast Asian art market, it is clear that the Southeast Asian art market is a category and a concept that wealth managers and an international art world are interested in escalating for value. It is constructed as a new frontier for investment and definition, supported by the freeport, a form of global infrastructure that streamlines flows, ‘collecting’ the region in a hub of ‘art’. As a concept, Southeast Asia is a recent historical development. Southeast Asia as a geographical idea was a response to the Japanese military army effectively controlling the entire stretch between British Burma and the Hispano-American Philippines. It was only normalised in 1955 with the publishing of former British colonial civil servant D.G.E. Hall’s *A History of South-East Asia*.⁵⁷ Southeast Asia as a market, and specifically as an art market, is a far more contemporary concept—one so recent that its dating is debatable and capable of misattribution by wealth managers. Kelly Easterling’s work *Extrastatecraft* sees zones and exceptional infrastructure, such as the freeport, as formulas in making ‘world cities’.⁵⁸ However, in the case of Singapore and the Southeast Asian art market, it is arguable that the zone is more than a formula for a city. In examining the discourse around Singapore’s freeport, the freeport itself, and the combined efforts of the public and private sectors in ‘shepherding’ an industry by addressing a critical logistical gap in the global art market and specifically in emergent art markets that do not have the means to stump up the necessary capital to build world infrastructures, the zone becomes not just a formula for a world city but one for crafting a regional art market. Kishore Mahbubani in his recent book *Has the West Lost It?* makes an interesting observation about the relationship between regions and regional markets:

In the mid 1990s, some in the West began to notice that a major Asian economic resurgence was happening. The desire to engage with Asia grew. The first ASEM Summit was held in Bangkok with great fanfare on 12 March 1996. However, a year later as soon as... Asian economies—including Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and South Korea—suffered in the Asian Financial Crisis, Europe once again lost interest in Asia.⁵⁹

In other words, with economic promise comes recognition of the region; or rather, with the prospect of economic growth comes regional recognition.

The Bouvier Affair

The Bouvier Affair is an ongoing court battle between Bouvier and Russian oligarch and art collector, Dmitry Rybolovlev, over fraud and Bouvier's alleged profiting from the dealing of blue-chip artworks to Rybolovlev. The affair started in 2015 and has spanned Singapore, Monaco and Switzerland. The linchpin of the legal argument has come down to the capacity in which Bouvier was acting on Rybolovlev's behalf.

Stefen Heidenreich's examination of the stakes of this affair is particularly useful in understanding why Bouvier's role is so contested:

[The lack of transparency in the art world supported by the networked centralisation of the Freeport] is perhaps what Yves Bouvier understood that Dmitry Rybolovlev, the Russian collector he overcharged by roughly one billion dollars for several paintings, did not. By reinvesting that money in new arms of his freeport empire in Luxembourg and Singapore, he was creating the institutional architecture that would retroactively confirm the validity of the exorbitant prices he had charged, which then became the founding deposits, securing his bank of art. The value of a Picasso without a system of freeports might be much less than the value of a Picasso in a world equipped with a full-service, international network of institutions designed to preserve, and thus recognize, in perpetuity, the absolute value of the works in question.⁶⁰

Crucially, Heidenreich points to the continual activation and strategic construction of this freeport ecology across a variety of scales, from international to the interpersonal relationships of Bouvier and his clients. The Singapore Freeport is a dynamic combination of logistics hub and various networks, which transform it into a value-augmenting mechanism. The freeport's ability to create a series of value chains of which it is the central logistics hub, can be clearly seen in the case of the Singapore Freeport. The freeport was and to a certain extent continues to be a one-stop shop for all artwork-related services for collectors, including storage, insurance, dealing, documenting, analyzing and more.⁶¹ Government sanctions have further made the use of the Singapore Freeport more appealing by allowing valuables of the Freeport to be exhibited temporarily in Singapore without incurring duties or taxes, facilitating the accumulation of cultural value for any artworks shown. From fair to museum to other freeports, the distribution channels and logistics management that is honed and built by Le Freeport helps create value.

Furthermore, what is valuable to understand about this mechanism is that beyond the supposed value that Heidenreich suggests, it also met other financial needs. Journalist accounts of the Bouvier Affair have revealed why and how storing his art in Singapore was beneficial to Rybolovlev. *The Bouvier Affair: A True Story* by Alexandra Bregman, a book that started as a master's thesis in journalism and was published in 2019, is perhaps the most detailed account of Bouvier and Rybolovlev's relationship and the collection of art that they built and which found itself at the heart of court battles. Bregman notes how Bouvier would help Rybolovlev build an art collection, then later in 2011 help to move and store it in Hong Kong, London and the Singapore Freeport so that Rybolovlev's wife (whom he was divorcing from 2008–14 in one of the world's most expensive divorces) and the Russian government could not claim his wealth.⁶²

Since the Bouvier Affair in 2015 and with the publication of different studies of the incident, the Singapore Freeport has suffered from a downturn in public opinion. It was reported that a few customers left the Geneva Freeport. Philippe Dauvergne, chief executive officer of the Luxembourg Freeport, stated that “the scandal cast a shadow over the December 2014 opening of the site”, which opened with only a 75 per cent occupancy. Bouvier himself reported that he had to suspend projects, including a planned freeport in Shanghai and an annex that was due to be completed in Singapore in 2018.⁶³ In an interview with Bloomberg in 2017, Bouvier claimed that the disputes with Rybolovlev had cost him nearly US\$1 billion in lost business.⁶⁴ In 2017, in the wake of the Bouvier Affair, Swiss authorities investigated Yves Bouvier for tax evasion of more than 100 million euros in taxes related to his cross-border art dealings. That same year Natural Le Coultre and its stake in the Geneva Freeport was sold to André Chenue, a Parisian shipping firm, in 2017 for an undisclosed amount.⁶⁵

Following on the heels of the Bouvier Affair in 2015, the Art and Finance report of 2016 by Deloitte did not mention the Freeport. Instead it claimed that:

Improved art market infrastructure will help the regional art market to prosper: Art Stage Singapore, the premier art fair in the region is holding its 6th edition in January 2016. The fair has acted as a catalyst for the Southeast Asian art market and encouraged new investment in art market infrastructure, such as Gillman Barracks (gallery district) and the launch of the National Gallery Singapore.⁶⁶

Importantly, while the report suggests that the fair was responsible for substantial investments in Gillman Barracks and the National Gallery Singapore, both initiatives were already part of long-term government policies that

predate fair and by extension the freeport.⁶⁷ This once more highlights the tendency to elevate the market as the epitome of what defines a region, as opposed to the significant impact of governmental initiatives. Furthermore, this discrepancy questions the valency of the narratives put forward by this report and instead points to what narratives are important for speculation around Singapore's development as a financial hub for art and for the South-east Asian art market in general. Unrelated to the Bouvier Affair, Singapore Pinacothèque closed in February 2016 after going into receivership in 2015 and Art Stage Singapore closed its doors in 2019, citing poor local sales and "unfair competition" from SEA Focus, a project by the Singapore Tyler Print Institute supported by the Singapore state.⁶⁸ What is interesting about this claim is that it reveals the significant and definitive role of government support in the viability of a for-profit art venture and an art market.

In 2018, the Singapore Freeport lost its prestigious tenant Christie's when Christie's Fine Art Storage Services (CFASS) sold all its shares and interest to Asia Freeport Holdings Pte Ltd. Asia Freeport Holdings was formally known as Natural Le Coultre Pte Ltd and was renamed CFASS Fine Art Storage Service.⁶⁹ Beyond the decline in the Singapore Freeport's prominence as art infrastructure, as reported by financial institutions, the supposed value chain around the Singapore Freeport had by 2019 declined in prestige. Furthermore, the Singapore Freeport was no longer referenced in relation to the Southeast Asian art market.

On Narrative Economics and the Singapore Freeport

Narratives drive economics and the loss of prestige can be more significant than the mere loss of reputation. Robert Schiller's *Narrative Economics: How stories go viral and drive major economic events* explains:

An economic narrative is a contagious story that has the potential to change how people make economic decisions, such as the decision to hire a worker or to wait for better times...or to invest in a volatile speculative asset. Economic narratives are usually not the most prominent narratives circulating, and to identify them we have to look at their potential to change economic behaviour... [Furthermore] powerful economic narratives of the past...are not completely forgotten and someone seeking a powerful story may rediscover them. The constellations may change, providing new content for, and thereby increasing the contagion rate of an old narrative and developing the idea into a major epidemic, sometimes after a long time lag.

Schiller offers the boycott as one example of this recurrent narrative, starting with the word entering language in 1880 with Charles Boycott, the first victim of a boycott by an Irish organization of land tenants who wanted rent cuts in the face of a bad crop. The boycott became the main tool of unions. During the depression of 1890s, boycotts were viewed unfavourably, lending to its restriction. Schiller, however, contends that the boycott did not disappear but periodically emerged as long as it was supported by a positive narrative.

In considering Schiller's theory that narratives have defined trade and economics throughout history, it is particularly significant that Bergman in her account of the Bouvier Affair notes that the intense attention and media scrutiny brought upon the Singapore Freeport was part of a larger strategy of changing the narratives that defined Bouvier's model and his freeports:

When Rybolovlev sought to destroy his reputation with one fell swoop of Russian power and a polished international media team, Bouvier rose to the challenge with his subtler Swiss confidence, using a network of whisperers and trusted associates who extolled his personality and justified his behaviour.⁷⁰

The significance of this should not be understated. In undertaking a public relations campaign against Bouvier, Rybolovlev put forward a narrative that moved the Singapore Freeport from being the nucleus of a Southeast Asian art market to a facility lacking in transparency and engaged in dubious dealings with ill-begotten gains.

Bad Press and the Offshore Art World

In reality, the narratives of the Bouvier Affair that painted Bouvier as a potentially unethical figure profiting from ill-begotten gains are narratives that have plagued the offshore world. The offshore world in this respect is a term that Ronen Palan uses to describe "a significant socio-economic development in the world economy that includes tax havens, export processing zones, flags of convenience and certain developments in e-commerce". As wealth creation and competition has come to define the governing logics of a post-Cold War world order, loopholes, tax breaks and other exceptional opportunities have been afforded large corporations and the rich and powerful. These opportunities are important tools for the international mobility of capital and therefore are often criticised as tools for money laundering, tax avoidance and evasion. This is in spite of the historical legacy of tax havens and free ports being tools by colonial administrations to develop trading ports.

Moreover, the offshore world is also known to be a cloak for kleptocracy, “a safe haven for the proceeds of political corruption, illicit arms dealing, illegal diamond trafficking and the global drug trade, [facilitating] the plunder of public funds by corrupt elites in poor countries, which can represent a major barrier to economic and social development”.⁷¹ Nicholas Shaxson, an offshore capital expert and author of *Treasure Islands*, has described tax havens as “secrecy jurisdictions”. He uses the term ‘offshore’ to describe the international system of tax havens. He estimates that US\$21–32 trillion of private wealth is located—untaxed or lightly taxed—in the top ten countries of global tax havens (Singapore is number three) and that African developing countries alone have lost over \$1 trillion through tax avoidance in the 1970s.⁷² John Zarobell recently reported: “A 2014 study by the Canton of Geneva found that its freeport generated tax losses worth almost US\$300 million annually for the canton, even though 80 percent of the owners of its storage spaces were foreign.”⁷³

These insidious associations of free zones and tax havens as spaces of unfair and unethical dealings to accrue wealth is a narrative that is easily transplanted onto the Singapore Freeport. In relation to the unregulated status of the art market and its involvement in global trade, John Zarobell has even claimed that “tax avoidance is the reason offshore financial centres exist, and this is also true of freeports”, arguing that the freeport is a way for individuals and corporations to “skirt the law”.⁷⁴

How true is this? Can the corporations and individuals that use the Singapore Freeport truly skirt the law? Bergman claims that Rybolovlev attempted to use the Singapore Freeport and shell companies through Bouvier to hide his assets from his wife during their divorce and from the Russian government after he had liquidated the proceeds of his IPO sale into art. Perhaps for the ultra-rich, there are some opportunities to be gained in risk mitigation. Beyond this, the freeport enables other financial mechanisms that allow owners to derive more value out of their art. As John Zarobell explained:

Art investing is an expanding industry facilitated by freeports. Once art is in storage, owners do not want its value to sit – the equivalent of having cash stashed under a mattress. Some owners use art as collateral to buy more art, or other collectibles or real estate. In this way, freeports can drive art investment and multiply art values by providing credit to buy or bid on more artworks, hiking prices further. And, there are more complicated investment vehicles, such as the buying and selling of risk, hedges and reinsurance, to say nothing of the blockchain technology startups that sell “tokens.”

Freeports generate their own budding economy in a neoliberal capital framework: severing owners from their assets during taxable events for tax benefits, with added implications for the market.⁷⁵

Yet, according to Ryan Su, an art lawyer familiar with the Singapore Freeport, for the average local user of the Singapore Freeport, tax benefits do not come into the picture. In addition, the complicated collateralising of artwork for cash that have inspired art portfolio investment models, such as Athena Art Fund and Maecenas, is not well set up in Singapore, with very few players possessing the proper credentials to evaluate art as collateral for banks. Given that Singapore has no capital gains tax and that duties have to be paid if an artwork is taken out of the Singapore Freeport and is sold, Zarobell's emphasis on tax avoidance does not apply to all art collectors or art investors. Moreover, these complex mechanisms of extracting capital from art might primarily be found in the domain of the Western art world.⁷⁶

However, even if the financial mechanisms enjoyed by the Singapore Freeport are the privilege of only the wealthy elite of the international art world, the Singapore Freeport remains a confluence between the international art world and Singapore. This was never more evident than in the artistic representation that followed on the heels of the Bouvier Affair and which positions the Singapore Freeport as a part of the offshore world. Hito Steyerl's now infamous examination of the freeport system in *E-flux* compared the Singapore Freeport with then Syrian First Lady Asma al-Assad's plans for the future of Syria's museums.⁷⁷

Trevor Paglen's *Art Mission Patch* (2016) 3/6, an embroidered collectable patch with a border that reads "Panama, Geneva, Singapore, Luxembourg, I Didn't Do it, Nobody Saw me Do it and You Can't Prove Anything" around an image that recalls Amedeo Modigliani's *Seated Man with a Cane*, a painting that was allegedly looted by Nazis, speaks to the Singapore Freeport's role in relation to the Panama Papers. The Panama Papers, a data leak of 200,000 offshore entities set up by wealthy individuals around the world in 2016, revealed that Modigliani's painting was in the collection of a shell company of the collector David Nahmad.⁷⁸ The painting was held in a storage facility in Geneva, but by listing the network of free ports that the painting was connected to, Paglen manages to place the Singapore Freeport within another controversial account.

Similarly, *The Heavens*, a photographic series by Gabriele Galimberti and Paolo Woods, envisions what the *New York Times* has called realms of "fiscal paradise"—free ports and tax havens around the world. These representations of the freeport not only place the Singapore Freeport in an imagined

framework of a global network of tax havens, but also position it squarely in a global infrastructure of capital movement cloaked in tropical sunshine—a nefarious image of global conspiracy defined by extreme wealth inequalities.

Conclusion

Continually mentioned in the media and in artistic projects like *The Heavens*, the freeport and FTZs figure as islands, somewhere far off and pushed away from the bounds of the Global North, the connection to which is only exposed through the occasional media scandal such as the Bouvier Affair or the Panama Papers. In this way the freeport is still most frequently imagined as other—somehow both separate and uncontainable—and somewhat illicit.⁷⁹ Yet this distancing to an ‘off’shore frequently leaves out the growing use and implementation of ‘on’shore zones across the globe and at times perpetuates the deeply entrenched colonial history of offshoring mechanisms that we have highlighted. Rather, as we have demonstrated through the Bouvier Affair and the imagination of the Southeast Asian art market, these zones are not separate phenomena. Instead, they are part of an extensive geographic and institutional (both governmental and private) chain that, above all, moves to optimize geopolitical-economic strategy while reducing risk to a minimum. By separating freeports or zones as only a tax issue or an exclusionary space, we risk not attending to this widespread network, which is in fact of greater consequence to both the art sector, larger market and geopolitical struggles.

As the Bouvier scandal received increasing attention and passed through multiple courts and was eyed for audit by the Swiss Federal Tax Administration (amongst others), we see the structure of the value chain morph in order to reduce risk, maintain profit and optimize location, as the public attention impacted art sales negatively in the freeport.⁸⁰ Le Freeport lost upwards of SGD18 million in 2018, which Bouvier noted had a ripple effect globally, claiming that “attacks by Mr. Rybolovlev against me in various courts and in the media have had a very negative effect on my business operations worldwide, including on the FreePort in Singapore”.⁸¹ This included abandoning his plans to build a freeport in Shanghai, a move that could have significantly impacted art market logistics in the Southeast Asia region by adding another large logistics zone to China, in addition to the Beijing Free Port of Culture.⁸² As seen by the recent massive Chinese investments into the Philippines logistical warehouse economic zone, New Clark City, and the consequent American concerns, the play for increased control over such economic zones across Southeast Asia remains a source of significant geopolitical tension.⁸³

Indeed, the imperial status of that particular zone has been glaringly obvious since its usage as an American base from 1903 and its continuation as a major source of economic, military and technological mobilization for the United States up to this recent investment turn.⁸⁴

The art market, which has been critiqued and analyzed for its non-transparent flows by scholars such as Suhail Malik, Isabelle Graw and Noah Horowitz amongst others, still demands at least an appearance of a moral code.⁸⁵ As a report titled “Quantifying Reputation and Success in Art” astutely noted, “in areas of human activity where performance is difficult to quantify in an objective fashion [such as the art sector], reputation and networks of influence play a key role in determining access to resources and rewards”.⁸⁶ The large amount of media attention to the Bouvier Affair and to the potential tax evasion activities by elites associated with the offshore world, has received significant attention by art criticism and art, and thereby more scrutiny.

As both Malik and the data in the report demonstrate, “the structures in the art world are set for elite success, and only elite success”, and they rely on extensive networked infrastructure and reputation chains in order to bolster and maintain value.⁸⁷ The Bouvier Affair is an elaborate mapping of some of these elite logistical-intra-personal links as they spread across an expansive geographic area. This once more highlights the importance of observing these phenomena not just as isolated tax issues, but rather as a symptom of a greater infrastructural problem related to capital inequality and mobilization. While Bouvier, and indeed many art investment firms, are undergoing transparency efforts and regulatory measures in order to address these tax concerns and thereby re-cement a solid reputation in the sector, the larger zone chain simply morphs to find less risky, more advantageous positions.⁸⁸ In spectacularizing and focusing solely on the freeport as one example, the art world risks once more turning inwards and isolating a part of a larger problem that continues to structure the unequal balance of profit, power and distribution in the field and more broadly. As in the case of the Bouvier Affair, critical scrutiny of the Singapore Freeport elided some of the key questions related to the perpetuation of the wealth inequalities and structural issues that enable a free agent to marshall private and public funds to develop the Singapore Freeport.

Furthermore, it is important to understand that these chains have consequences beyond simply the art market and which are increasingly crucial to attend to. As scholars such as Deborah Cowen, Michelle Murphy, Ned Rossiter and others have noted, this kind of emphasis on seamless, constant circulation through the optimization of logistics networks such as freeport zones,

is a crucial underpinning of capital strategy in the 20th and 21st centuries.⁸⁹ For Cowen these logistics centres or cities:

highlight the increasing global integration of urban space into managed networks of goods circulation underpinning both trade and warfare... But this urban form is not only material; it is also—through this materiality—centrally political. Efficient movement, an economy of space and time, becomes antipolitics. The replacement of objectives with efficiency is the tyranny of techne.⁹⁰

What Cowen describes is the capitulation of time, space, material and life to infrastructures and processes that prioritize efficiency. With its sleek, technocratic marketing imagery, this logistical turn was something within which the Singapore Freeport sought to place itself strategically, as we have described, via its various one-stop-shop operations and security branding. Thoroughly embedded across multiple locations through corporate, private, state and military infrastructure, freeports operate in the space described by Cowen, especially in their drive to ensure risk-free, value circulation, as well as investment maintenance for its powerful stakeholders.

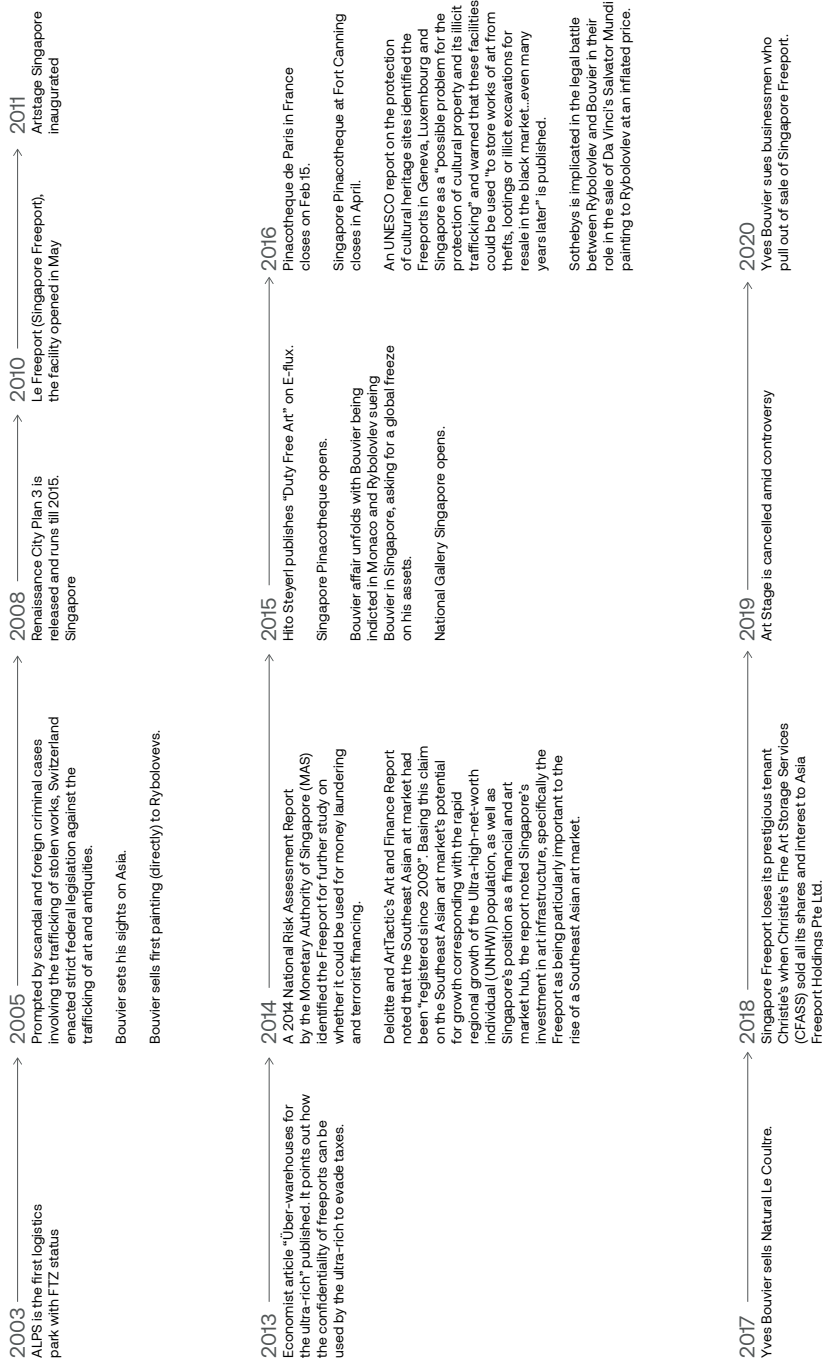
While this already begins to turn the conversation away from just an art world-centric issue, Cowen and Murphy dig further into the urgencies this logistical turn brings forth, particularly as it pertains to what Murphy calls the “economization of life”.⁹¹ For Murphy, the economization of life “names the practices that differentially value and govern life in terms of their ability to foster the macroeconomy of the nation-state”.⁹² While the unequal evaluation and governance of material, lives, time, space and resources in relation to perceived optimization and profit is, we argue, still a prevalent feature of a logistics economy, it moves beyond centring the nation towards the global circulation of elite capital. What Murphy’s economization of life allows us to point to is the necessity to frame discussions of zones, like freeports, in relation to this extraction and mobilization of life, where people, resources and the climate are sacrificed in order to maintain efficiency and circulation. This is what scholars such as Easterling and Halpern, Mitchell and Geoghehan have pointed to in the many abandoned “smart” cities, where massive amounts of livelihoods, resources and terrain were completely upturned for a corporate venture, only to be discarded when the project is no longer profitable or tenable.⁹³

Returning to the Deloitte Art and Finance Report of 2014, which related the Singapore Freeport to the emergence of a Southeast Asian art market only for this association to disappear in years after the narrative economics

of the Bouvier Affair, it becomes clear that the proficiency and success of zones and freeports relies on such evaluations, or rather devaluations, built not just on expanding physical networks (in the case of Deloitte's imagination of the Southeast Asian art market, this was based on the Singapore Freeport being able to serve an emergent class of wealth centred on Singapore as a trading hub), but also on moral pronouncements made by art critics, artists and art world elites. In being able to identify and attend to these links, narrative impulses and infrastructures, we begin to ask questions like: why was Bouvier criticised more than Ryobolovlev for using the Singapore Freeport to his advantage? Why are narratives of the Singapore Freeport predominantly about tax benefits when there are local users of the freeport who identify critical infrastructure needs such as climate-controlled art storage motivating their use of the Singapore Freeport? What is the role of the state in the Singapore Freeport and how does it serve the interests of Singapore as a global hub in a region defined by national markets? In turn, these questions, which this paper has addressed, illustrates how the Western-international art world overlaps with a Southeast Asian-regional-international art world and provides a critical angle out from the island image, a colonial construct that continues to linger for many in the Global South, and instead begins to analyze and redistribute power. This has never been more urgent a task as it is now for Singapore and its imaginations of a Southeast Asian art market. As Donald Low and Cherian George recently quipped in an article on the General Elections of 2020:

The post-pandemic world of de-globalisation, diversification of supply chains, and de-carbonisation—not to mention the strategic rivalry between the United States and China—may well be one that is not conducive for city-states highly reliant on trade and investment flows, and an open, liberal global order.⁹⁴

TIMELINE: SINGAPORE FREEPORT



Timeline is courtesy of Studio Vanessa Ban. This timeline is not comprehensive and is based on sources referenced in this essay. Please see footnotes and bibliography for original sources.

Timeline is courtesy of Vanessa Ban Studios. While based on sources referenced in this timeline was *The Bouvier Affair: A True Story* by Alexandra Bregman.

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BIOGRAPHY

offshoreart.co is a curatorial and research collective organised by Kathleen Ditzig and Robin Lynch. It thinks through the offshore economies as a way of understanding global infrastructures and the narratives that support them. Frequently a privileged structure of 'otherness', the offshore can speak to an independent legal, political zone or outlying subsidiary of the state that addresses deficiencies in centres of power. The collective is particularly engaged in unpacking how the offshore is part of art-world 'making' and reading the offshore through a postcolonial lens as it pertains to art scenes outside the Global North.

NOTES

- ¹ To avoid confusion, this paper uses 'Singapore Freeport' when referring to the place and infrastructure and 'Le Freeport' when referring to the company that owns the Singapore Freeport. "Owner of Singapore 'Fort Knox' maximum-security vault sues over failed freeport sale", *The Business Times*, 15 June 2020. <https://www.businesstimes.com.sg/banking-finance/owner-of-singapore-fort-knox%C2%A0maximum-security-vault-sues-over-failed-freeport-sale> [accessed July 2020].
- ² See: Stefan Heidenreich, "Freeportism as Style and Ideology: Post-internet and Speculative Realism, Part I", *Journal #71 e-flux* (March 2016). <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/71/60521/freeportism-as-style-and-ideology-post-internet-and-speculative-realism-part-i/> [accessed July 2020].
- ³ The term 'narrative economics' is adapted from Shiller's usage and will be explained below. See: Robert J. Shiller, *Narrative Economics: How Stories Go Viral and Drive Major Economic Events* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020).
- ⁴ See Claudia Dias, "Singapore, the New Team Player for the Art World", *KUNSTZEITUNG*, May 2010. www.modavivendi.com/?p=1142 [accessed July 2020]. Yves Bouvier is a majority shareholder in both the Luxembourg and Singapore free ports. However, he has stepped down from his management position as a result of the Bouvier Affair in 2015. See: Sarah Scone, "Yves Bouvier Steps Down From Le Freeport", *Artnet News*, 13 April 2015. www.news.artnet.com/art-world/yves-bouvier-steps-down-at-le-freeport-287388 [accessed July 2020].
- ⁵ See: "Logistics Brochure by the Economic Development Board", *Logistics Brochure by the Economic Development Board*, 2010. www.edb.gov.sg/content/dam/edb/en/resources/brochuresnew/Logistic-Brochure.pdf [accessed July 2020].
- ⁶ The Freeport also benefited from Singapore's 2002 raft of laws that bolstered banking secrecy and strengthening of trusts. At the Singapore Freeport's official opening in 2010, then Senior Minister of State for Trade and Industry and Education, Mr S. Iswaran, noted that more investors were choosing to put their money in high-value "investments of passion", such as fine art. With Singapore's strategic location, infrastructure and ties to markets in Asia, he added that "Singapore is an ideal location for companies seeking to tap into the arts and collectibles trade in the region." In this vein, the Freeport lent to Singapore's image as a prominent and essential city in the international art world.
- ⁷ Nazanin Lankarani, "A New Concept in Handling Art", *New York Times*, 9 June 2009. www.nytimes.com/2009/06/10/arts/10iht-rcartoff.html [accessed July 2020].
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Chris Prystay, "Singapore Bling", *Wall Street Journal*, 21 May 2010. www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703691804575255551995870746 [accessed July 2020].

- ¹⁰ Author's interview with Ryan Su, Singapore, 28 June 2020.
- ¹¹ See Anthony Dapiran, "Freeports", *ArtAsiaPacific*, November 2012. www.artasiapacific.com/Magazine/81/Freeports [accessed July 2020].
- ¹² See paragraph 12 of: Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to Its Countries of Origin Or Its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation, "Free Ports and Risks of Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property", *Unesco*, 30 October 2016. www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/pdf/2_FC_free_port_working_document_Final_EN_revclean.pdf [accessed July 2020].
- ¹³ "History", *LE FREEPORT*. www.singaporefreeport.com/index.php#/history [accessed July 2020].
- ¹⁴ See National Arts Council, *Annual Report 2011*. See Section 8 "Available for Sale Investment", p. 91. https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/government_records/Flipviewer/grid_publish/6/64c6fdcd-d636-11e5-b8bb-0050568939ad-s77of2012/web/html5/index.html?launchlogo=tablet/GovernmentRecords_brandingLogo_.png&pn=8
- ¹⁵ Laying the foundation for developments such as the Freeport were initiatives by the government to develop Singapore as a global centre for arts, culture and entertainment through the Creative Industries policy and 2000–12 Renaissance City Plans (RCP). Arts and culture were seen as an economic strategy to develop Singapore into a place that attracted foreign investment and global capital. The RCP was accepted in Parliament in 2000, and the allocation of S\$50 million over a five-year period, on top of the normal funding for the arts, was approved for the proposed programmes and schemes to transform Singapore into a "Renaissance City" (HistorySG 2015). The RCP was geared to transform Singapore into a "Distinctive Global City for the Arts", where arts and culture would enhance the attractiveness of Singapore as a place to live and work (Kong 2012: 279–94). It was built on the 1989 Report of the Advisory Council on Culture and Art, which highlighted the economic and social importance of the arts. The RCP also grew from the EDB's Creative Services Strategic Business Unit, which set up a study of 18 task forces in 1990 covering creative industry areas such as film, design and media, all with the intent of building Singapore's creative industries. Several policies were later developed to complement RCP, including the Media21 plan in 2003, which sought to develop Singapore into a leading media marketplace and financing hub, and then Design Singapore in 2003, which aimed to position Singapore as Asia's hub for design excellence (Kong 2012). These policies recognised that economic success depended on maneuvering within a globalised world and participating in a knowledge-based economy. By 2002, it was clear that the creative cluster not only generated economic value directly, it was also an economy-wide enabler that drove innovation, producing an adaptable and creative workforce that was well suited to the ebbs and flows of the international market, while simultaneously contributing

to Singapore's soft power. See: Lily Kong, "Ambitions of a Global City: Arts, Culture and Creative Economy in 'Post-Crisis' Singapore", *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 18, 3: 279–94. See also: "Renaissance City Report Is Issued – Singapore History", *HistorySG*, National Library Board, Singapore, eresources.nlb.gov.sg/history/events/d0504b41-06f4-4f4b-80d2-f7d84aa2086d [accessed July 2020].

- ¹⁶ This comment is made in relation to the history of global financialisation, which is aligned with the collapse of the Bretton Woods system in 1971 and the removal of the gold standard and the introduction of free-floating exchange rates. US-led economic policy caused the global economy to move away from organisation based on industrialisation to financialisation. As Victora Ivanonva has noted in her essay *Art, Systems, Finance*, "financialisation, explicitly places the power into the hands of the investor who selects what can be produced by either opening or blocking access to the realm of circulation and implicitly into the hands of those who have the capacity and scalability to shape investment worthy ventures." In a global financial economy, art is another vehicle for investment, an asset that returns on profits and is a hedge against volatile investments. The British Rail Pension Fund, the canonical example of funds that invested in art, began in the 1970s in the face of decline in other investments at the time. See: Victoria Ivanova, "Art, Systems, Finance", in *Intersubjectivity Vol. 11: Scripting the Human*, ed. Lou Cantor and Katherine Rochester (Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press, 2018), p. 28.
- ¹⁷ See Dias, "Singapore, the New Team Player for the Art World".
- ¹⁸ See Nur Asyiqin Mohamad Salleh and Lee Jian Xuan, "Firm Behind Singapore Pinacothèque De Paris Faces Two More Lawsuits", *The Straits Times*, 14 April 2016. www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/arts/firm-behind-singapore-pinacothèque-de-paris-faces-two-more-lawsuits [accessed July 2020].
- ¹⁹ See Christopher D. Shea, "Private Pinacothèque De Paris Museum to Close", *New York Times*, 12 February 2016. www.artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/02/12/private-pinacothèque-de-paris-museum-to-close/ [accessed July 2020].
- ²⁰ Florence de Changy, "Singapour a Désormais Sa Pinacothèque De Paris", *Le Monde.fr*, 4 June 2015. www.lemonde.fr/arts/article/2015/06/04/singapour-a-desormais-sa-pinacothèque-de-paris_4647357_1655012.html [accessed July 2020].
- ²¹ Adeline Chia, "Modigliani to Kick off Singapore's Pinacothèque", *Blouin Art Info Southeast Asia*, 29 May 2013. www.sea.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/908387/modigliani-to-kick-off-singapores-pinacothèque [accessed July 2020].
- ²² Catherine Nives, "Ce Visionnaire Qui a Parié Sur L'Asie", *Bilan*, 4 September 2013. www.bilan.ch/entreprises-les-plus-de-la-redaction/ce-visionnaire-qui-parie-sur-lasie [accessed July 2020].
- ²³ Sam Knight, "The Art-World Insider Who Went Too Far", *New Yorker*, 17 November 2017. www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/02/08/the-bouvier-affair [accessed July 2020].

- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Luc Boltanski et al., *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), p. 124.
- ²⁶ “Art and Finance Report 2014”, 2014, p. 46. www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/es/Documents/acerca-de-deloitte/Deloitte-ES-Opera_Europa_Deloitte_Art_Finance_Report2014.pdf [accessed July 2020].
- ²⁷ See Hito Steyerl, *Duty Free Art* (London and New York: Verso Books, 2018), p. 114–50. Steyerl argues that “Freeport art storage is to this “stack” as the national museum traditionally was to the nation. It sits in between countries in pockets of superimposing sovereignties where national jurisdiction has either voluntarily retreated or been demolished. If biennials, art fairs, 3D renderings of gentrified real estate, starchitect museums decorating various regimes etc., are the corporate surfaces of these areas, these secret museums [or freeports] are their dark web, their Silk Road into which things disappear, as into an abyss of withdrawal.” See also: Stefan Heidenreich, “Freeportism as Style and Ideology: Post-Internet and Speculative Realism, Part I”, *Journal #71 e-flux* (March 2016). www.e-flux.com/journal/71/60521/freeportism-as-style-and-ideology-post-internet-and-speculative-realism-part-i/ [accessed July 2020].
- ²⁸ For an examination of the historical connection between FTZ and colonial free ports through the lens of Mumbai, see Megan Maruschke, “Are There Connections Between Previous Free Port Practices and Current Special Economic Zones? The Case of Mumbai’s Ports”, *TRAFO – Blog for Transregional Research*, 19 May 2016, trafo.hypotheses.org/2112#identifier_21_2112 [accessed July 2020]. However the formulation of the history of the free zone or FTZ may go back further than the colonial period. The World EPZ Association’s narrative dates Delos in 166 BCE as the first ‘free zone’. This has been debated and goes beyond the parameters of this paper. In looking specifically at Singapore’s freeport, the history this paper addresses is rooted in the colonial period.
- ²⁹ Keller Easterling, “Zone: The Spatial Softwares of Extrastatecraft”, *Places Journal* (June 2012). <https://doi.org/10.22269/120610>.
- ³⁰ Historising the development of the colonial freeport to the FTZs of the post-colonial state, Patrick Neveling has explained how many post-colonial nations after World War II developed import-substitution politics to quicken industrialisation. These policies were based on the Prebisch-Singer thesis that argued for developments based on the international flows of commodities and capitals. Prebisch, who became the first secretary general of the United Nations Commission on Trade and Development in 1965, believed that imperialism turned colonies into suppliers of raw materials for manufacturing industries in the coloniser’s home nation and that after decolonisation these former colonies were still embedded in systems where nations of the former colonisers continued to profit. The profits for imports

of raw materials were not equitable to the profits made on the manufactured goods sold back to the countries that had sold the raw materials. Operating in the spirit of the Prebisch-Singer thesis and bolstered by the foundation of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development UNCTAD with Prebisch as director, the strategy of the FTZ was emphasised as important for the development of postcolonial nations. For a more expansive history, see P. Neveling, "Free Trade Zones, Export Processing Zones, Special Economic Zones and Global Imperial Formations 200 BCE to 2015 CE", in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism*, ed. I. Ness and Z. Cope (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 1007–16.

- ³¹ Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (London and Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 103.
- ³² See Keller Easterling, "Zone: The Spatial Softwares of Extrastatecraft"; and Neveling, "Free Trade Zones, Export Processing Zones, Special Economic Zones and Global Imperial Formations 200 BCE to 2015 CE".
- ³³ R. Davenport-Hines, ed., *British Business in Asia since 1860* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), "The Growth of Singapore", pp. 160–2.
- ³⁴ Christopher Miller, "From Foreign Concessions to Export Processing Zones", in *Decolonization and the Cold War: Negotiating Independence*, ed. L. James and E. Leake (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015).
- ³⁵ K. Nkrumah, *Neo-colonialism: The last stage of imperialism* (1974).
- ³⁶ See W. Ngoei, *Arc of Containment: Britain, the United States, and Anticommunism in Southeast Asia* (Cornell University Press) for an analysis of how Singapore financially profited from the Vietnam War.
- ³⁷ See Chia Siow Yue, *Singapore: Toward a Knowledge-Based Economy* (Nomura Foundation). https://www.nomurafoundation.or.jp/en/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/20000127-28_Siow-Yue_Chia.pdf.
- ³⁸ See Kenneth Tay, "The sea is all highway: Singapore and the logistical media of the global surface", MA thesis, The New School, 2019.
- ³⁹ See Ronen Palan, *The offshore world: Sovereign markets, virtual places, and nomad millionaires* (Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 34.
- ⁴⁰ "Art and Finance Report 2014", 2014, p. 46. www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/es/Documents/acerca-de-deloitte/Deloitte-ES-Opera_Europa_Deloitte_Art_Finance_Report2014.pdf.
- ⁴¹ Ben Davies' recent article, "Art and Investment", maps the terrain of this discourse. It notes explicitly that "art is not a good investment" and that "the drawbacks of art as investment are so multifarious and obvious that it almost seems churlish to recite them. Only the media's monomaniacal focus on record-breaking totals at the top of the auctions conceals this fact." He further states that "For the vast majority of art-buyers in Basel, London, New York, or Miami Beach, the art market remains

much as it was—a way to think about themselves as cool and au courant. It's just that the whole spectacle of conspicuous aesthetic consumption is so frivolous, you can't blame them if sometimes they also like to be told that they are not just splurging, but investing." The rise of art as an asset is more a story of the growth of wealth inequality and the consumption of the rise of high net worth individuals tied to the extraordinary profits and wealth accumulation of financialisation of a global market and the myth that art is worth investing in. This myth has defined the contemporary 'Western' art market. As early as 1984, critic Robert Hughes' essay *On Art and Money* already claimed that "The big project of the art market over the last 25 years has been to convince everyone that works of art, though they don't bear interest, offer such dramatic and consistent capital gains along with the intangible pleasures of ownership—what Berenson might have called "untactile values"—that they are worth investing large sums of money in. This creation of confidence, I sometimes think, is the cultural artifact of the last half of the twentieth century, far more striking than any given painting or sculpture." See: Ben Davies, "Art and Investment", *art-agenda* (25 March 2014). <https://www.art-agenda.com/features/?a=60497>. See Robert Hughes, "On Art and Money" *The New York Review of Books*, 6 December 1984. <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1984/12/06/on-art-and-money/> [accessed August 2020].

⁴² In 2011, Art Basel recognised the long-term potential of the Asian art market when it announced the acquisition of Art Hong Kong. See Olav Velthius, "The Contemporary Art Market between Stasis and Flux", in *Contemporary Art and Its Commercial Markets: A Report on Current Conditions and Future Scenarios*, ed. Maria Lind and Olav Velthius (Sternberg Press, 2012), p. 26; Joaquin Barriendos Rodriguez, "Geopolitics of Global Art: The Reinvention of Latin America as a Geo-aesthetic Region", in *The Global Art World*, ed. Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), pp. 98–114; and Clare Andrew's analysis of the art market in *Globalisation and the Art Market: Emerging Economies and the Art Trade in 2008* (Helvoirt: TEFAF, 2009), p. 27.

⁴³ "Asian Art Market in the Time of Globalization", *Catalyst*, Artprice.com, vol. 1, Art Stage Singapore, 2016, pp. 22–7.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Though one could claim from the handful of regionally networked galleries in existence that a regionally consuming group of collectors could exist. By extension, while there is no public listing of the collectors who house their works at the Freeport, Christie's regional office being at the Freeport indicates that the Freeport services collectors other than those based in Singapore.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Wang Zineng, "Market Watch", *Third Text* 25, 4 (2011): 466, doi:10.1080/09528822.2011.587691.

- ⁴⁸ The article notes, “Since the 2011 earthquake and the subsequent nuclear disaster in Japan, protecting works of art is the highest priority for such galleries making the freeport particularly important for their regional business.” See Anne Haeming, “‘Le Freeport Singapore’ — Riches behind Bars”, *Lufthansa Magazin*, magazin. lufthansa.com/xx/en/aviation-en/singapur-reichtum-hinter-gittern/.
- ⁴⁹ See Olav Velthius, “The Contemporary Art Market in Stasis and Flux”, p. 26.
- ⁵⁰ Flows into and out of the Freeport are not publicly available. However, reports in newspapers and public interviews with its clients have recurrently framed the Freeport as a hub for Southeast Asia. Beyond art, this also applies to other assets such as gold and diamonds.
- ⁵¹ See Paolo Virno, “About Exodus”, *Grey Room* 21 (2005): 20–1, doi:10.1162/152638105774539815.
- ⁵² “Art Market Intelligence: Southeast Asia”, *Art Market Guru*, 2017, pp. 12–3.
- ⁵³ C.J. Wan-ling Wee, *The Asian Modern: Culture, Capitalist Development* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2007).
- ⁵⁴ ArtTactic’s “Global Art Market Review & Outlook 2016” report predicted a negative outlook for Chinese contemporary art and a shift in focus to other Asian markets. Southeast Asia was noted as continuing to be one of the best performing markets, having embarked on a steady upward climb since the global market downturn in 2009. The Southeast Asian modern and contemporary art market experienced a 28 per cent growth in auction sales in 2015, spurred on by a shift in focus by auction houses in Hong Kong. See Michele Chan, “ArtTactic Global Art Market Outlook 2016 – China, India and Southeast Asia”, *Art Radar* (24 Feb. 2016). artradarjournal.com/2016/02/24/arttactic-global-art-market-outlook-2016-china-india-and-southeast-asia/.
- ⁵⁵ A. Bregman, *The Bouvier affair: A true story* (Ingram Content Group, 2019), p. 84.
- ⁵⁶ See: Singapore-Based Asian «Fort Knox» For Sale, *finews Asia* (Singapore), 22 July 2019. <https://www.finews.asia/high-end/29200-singapore-based-asian-fort-knox-for-sale>.
- ⁵⁷ See Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World*, 1st ed. (New York: Verso, 1998), p. 4; and Donald K. Emmerson, “‘Southeast Asia’: What’s in a Name?”, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 15, 1 (1984): 1–21, www.jstor.org/stable/20070562 for a more robust study of development of Southeast Asia as a term.
- ⁵⁸ Keller Easterling, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space* (Verso, 2016).
- ⁵⁹ Kishore Mahbubani, *Has the West Lost It?: a Provocation* (Allen Lane, 2018), pp. 42–3.
- ⁶⁰ See note 18 for more details on the Bouvier Affair. See Stefan Heidenreich, “Freeportism as Style and Ideology: Post-Internet and Speculative Realism, Part II”, *e-flux Journal* 73 (May 2016), www.e-flux.com/journal/73/60471/freeportism-

as-style-and-ideology-post-internet-and-speculative-realism-part-ii/ [accessed August 2020].

- ⁶¹ Cris Prystay, "Singapore Bling", *Wall Street Journal*, Dow Jones & Company, 21 May 2010. www.wsj.com/articles/SB1000142405274870369180457525551995870746.
- ⁶² Bregman, *The Bouvier affair: A true story*, p. 80.
- ⁶³ See Hugo Miller, "What Geneva's Art King Lost in Battle With Russian Billionaire", *Bloomberg*, 7 February 2017. www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-02-07/geneva-free-ports-king-mulls-art-fight-s-nearly-1-billion-toll. As the article illustrates, "2015 was a difficult year for Le Freeport. Money-laundering allegations surfaced against Yves Bouvier, the owner of its parent company Natural Le Coultre. A Russian client had taken him to court alleging attempted fraud. Bouvier was arrested and released on bail that was set at 27 million U.S. dollars, but his assets were frozen by a court order. Not ideal for business – on that, Tan, Pauli and Reynard are agreed. Many clients were irritated by this story. When it comes to security, especially in a free-trade zone, even the tiniest of shockwaves can have the impact of a magnitude 8.0 earthquake."
- ⁶⁴ Ibid.
- ⁶⁵ Bouvier remains the majority owner of his Luxembourg Freeport. See: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-07-17/asia-s-fort-knox-said-to-be-up-for-sale-as-owner-fights-tycoon>.
- ⁶⁶ Art and Finance Report 2016. <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/Finance/gx-fsi-art-finance-report-2016.pdf>
- ⁶⁷ In 2008, MICA had released a press release citing plans to build the National Gallery of Singapore as part of the Renaissance City Plan III. See: "MICA, NAC and NHB jointly releases the Renaissance City Plan III", 29 December 2008. <https://www.mci.gov.sg/pressroom/news-and-stories/pressroom/2008/12/mica-nac-and-nhb-jointly-releases-the-renaissance-city-plan-iii?page=130> [accessed 23 July 2020].
- ⁶⁸ See: A. Nanda and T.W. Li, "Art Stage Singapore fair cancelled days before opening; exhibitors scramble for alternative venues", *The Straits Times*, 16 January 2019. <https://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/arts/art-stage-fair-cancelled-days-before-opening> [accessed 24 July 2020].
- ⁶⁹ See business listing: <https://www.sgpbusiness.com/company/Asia-Freeport-Holdings-Pte-Ltd>.
- ⁷⁰ A. Bregman, *The Bouvier affair: A true story*, p. 54.
- ⁷¹ R. Palan, *The offshore world: Sovereign markets, virtual places, and nomad millionaires* (Cornell University Press), p. 48.
- ⁷² Quoted in Paolo Woods and Gabriele Galimberti, *The Heavens*, Dewi Lewis Media, as well as in *Migrant Journal 2: Wired Capital*, published by offshore studio. See Nichola Shaxson, *Treasure islands: uncovering the damage of offshore banking and tax havens* (New York City: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

- ⁷³ John Zarobell, "How the wealthy sell treasures tax-free", *YaleGlobal Online*. <https://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/how-wealthy-sell-treasures-tax-free>.
- ⁷⁴ See John Zarobell, *Art and the Global Economy* (University of California Press, 2017).
- ⁷⁵ John Zarobell, "How the wealthy sell treasures tax-free", *YaleGlobal Online*. <https://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/how-wealthy-sell-treasures-tax-free>.
- ⁷⁶ For the Southeast Asian art market, it is implausible that these financial mechanisms will become very popular unless there is a concerted and strategic effort to develop the prices of Southeast Asian art. Ryan Su also noted that collateralised lending in art was rare in Singapore and that there were a number of startups in New York providing such services. He further noted that even within Western art centres, such collateralised lending was uncommon.
- ⁷⁷ Hito Steyerl, "Duty Free Art", *e-flux* 63 (March 2015). <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/63/60894/duty-free-art/> [accessed 18 July 2020].
- ⁷⁸ Benjamin Sutton and Claire Voon, "Panama papers shed light on the shadowy art market", *Hyperallergic* 12 (2016). <https://hyperallergic.com/289250/panama-papers-shed-light-on-the-shadowy-art-market/>.
- ⁷⁹ See, for example, International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, "The Panama Papers: Exposing the Rogue Offshore Finance Industry", *International Consortium of Investigative Journalists*. <https://www.icij.org/investigations/panama-papers/>.
- ⁸⁰ Eileen Kinsella, "Swiss Authorities Investigate Charges That 'Freeport King' Yves Bouvier Owes More than 100\$ Million in Back Taxes", *Art and Law, artnetnews*, 6 September 2017. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/yves-bouvier-swiss-tax-charges-1072205>.
- ⁸¹ Chanyaporn Chanjaroen, Hugo Miller and Ranjeetha Pakjam, "Asia's 'Fort Knox' Said to be Up For Sale As Owner Fights Tycoon", *Bloomberg*, 17 July 2019. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-07-17/asia-s-fort-knox-said-to-be-up-for-sale-as-owner-fights-tycoon>.
- ⁸² Ibid.
- ⁸³ Timothy McLaughlin, "A U.S. Ally is Turning to China to Build, Build, Build: The Philippines is converting a historic American Military base into a city. Its key funder? China", *The Atlantic*, 8 May 2019. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/05/philippines-us-ally-china-investment/588829/>.
- ⁸⁴ See Deborah Cowen, "Logistics Cities: The 'Urban Heart' of Empire", *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), pp. 169–70.
- ⁸⁵ See Suhail Malik, "Contemporary Art: Neoliberal Reinforcer", Goldsmiths College Department of Art MFA Lectures 2018–2019, 21 March 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivQjEBaJh5g>; Isabell Graw, *High Price: Art Between the Market and Celebrity Culture* (Sternberg Press, 2009); Noah Horowitz, *Art of the Deal*:

Contemporary Art in a Global Financial Market (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014).

- ⁸⁶ S.P. Fraiberger et al., “Quantifying Reputation and Success in Art”, Reports, *Science* 1 (8 November 2018). Also quoted in Malik, 2019.
- ⁸⁷ Quoted from Malik, 2019. Fraiberger et al., 2018.
- ⁸⁸ See, for example, transparency efforts by Tiroche DeLeon Investment firm, which recently released a report as a way to “push forward with our agenda for more transparency and accountability in the art world” titled “Unmasked #1, Sales Report Q2, 2019”, *Art Vantage*, Tiroche DeLeon Collection, 2019.
- ⁸⁹ Cowen, 2014; Orit Halpern, Robert Mitchell and Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan, “The Smartness Mandate: Notes Toward a Critique”, *Grey Room* 68 (Summer 2017): 106–29; Michelle Murphy, *The Economization of Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017); Ned Rossiter, *Software, Infrastructure, Labor: A Media Theory of Logistical Nightmares*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016).
- ⁹⁰ Cowen, 2014, p. 193.
- ⁹¹ Murphy, 2017 and Cowen, 2014.
- ⁹² Murphy, 2017, p. 5.
- ⁹³ Easterling, 2014 and Halpern, Mitchell and Geoghegan, 2017.
- ⁹⁴ Cherian George and Donald Low, “Comment: GE2020—Why Singapore may lose, whatever the final score”, Yahoo News Singapore, 8 July 2020. <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/comment-ge-2020-why-singapore-may-lose-whatever-the-final-score-054230565.html>.

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