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Beyond Soft Power

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The Soft Power of Framing: Constructing Istanbul as a Regional Art Centre

Jérémie Molho

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Introduction

- 1 In 2014, to mark its tenth anniversary year, Istanbul Modern, Istanbul's first modern and contemporary art museum, opened an exhibition titled, *Neighbours – Contemporary Narratives from Turkey and Beyond*. The event showcased artists from neighbouring geographies considered to have historical, political and cultural ties with Turkey, including the Balkans, Caucasus, and Middle East.¹ The event reflects the growing interest in creating ties with art scenes in the region, particularly the Balkans and Middle East. Turkish curators have been increasingly involved in external cultural projects and Turkish artists have been featured in galleries and at art fairs in Dubai and Budapest. Correspondingly, Istanbul fairs have welcomed galleries from around the region. Explanations for these increasing interactions argue that they are the result of “Turkish soft power”. Both academics and policymakers have referred to Nye’s soft power theory to account for the development of links between Turkey and its surrounding region (Altunışık 2008; Çandar 2009). Within this perspective, the diffusion of culture through cultural centres and technological media, such as television soap operas, are considered to form a strategic component of the promotion of Turkey’s international influence.
- 2 Focusing on the specific case study of the contemporary visual arts world in Istanbul, the aim of this paper is to open the black box on this so-called Turkish soft power. To

this end, the art world will be regarded as a relatively autonomous system with its own organisational logics (Becker 1982; Bourdieu 1983). The contemporary arts sector has been analysed as a complex system of actors participating in the construction of a hierarchy of reputation (Moulin 2000; Thornton 2012; Heinich 2014). However, the process of construction has not been geographically neutral in its effects, resulting in the unequal distribution of symbolic power (Quemin 2006). It will be argued that within this context, actors in the art world construct cognitive frames in order to put new territories on the map. Therefore, increasing links between Istanbul and its surrounding region can be analysed as the outcome of the framing of the Middle East as an emerging region, and Istanbul as a rising regional centre.

- 3 The study is based on field research conducted in Istanbul between 2012 and 2014. Seventy-one semi-structured interviews were carried out with a variety of local art actors, including gallery owners, auction houses managers, foundation directors, collectors, curators, artists, and art fair managers. By focusing on the international networks and the interests and motivations of these actors, the methodology aims to demonstrate the positionality of actors in relation to the power dynamics of the art world and explore the strategies and discourses that are asserted for building external relations. I argue that the development of regional ties does not result from a top-down strategy, but from the construction of cognitive frames describing the rise of a regional art market or an alternative scene; and Istanbul as a rising regional art hub.
- 4 This paper will critically examine an understanding of regional interactions as a consequence of Turkish soft power and elaborate on the construction of spatialised cognitive frames within the art world. By asking how the Middle East has been framed as an emerging art market region, the study will discuss the ways in which Istanbul art galleries have seized this opportunity and subsequently altered their discursive position toward the relationship between Istanbul and the Middle East. Finally, I analyse the discourse of Istanbul institutional actors to illustrate how Istanbul is framed as an emerging regional art centre.

I. Beyond soft power theory: Framing and the social construction of art centres

- 5 Soft power theory can be understood as a concept that was developed to reduce the complexity of transnational cultural interactions for state strategy and corporate interests. Nye (1990) coined the term “soft power” to analyse the reconfiguration of American presence in the world following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the bipolar order, which had been at the forefront of US military strategy for the past four decades. Rather than resulting in the predicted decline of power, Nye argued that a variety of tools were available to the US to maintain their influence. Nye’s theory marked an effort to expand the notion of power by differentiating between its various processes (coercion, inducement, agenda-setting, and attraction), and defining the role of “soft” tools such as television, cinema, political discourse and cultural centres. While Nye’s approach has been widely applied to the analysis of Turkey’s new geopolitical context, two limitations can be perceived. Firstly, Nye overemphasised the role of state actors. In charge of defending national interests, they are encouraged to mobilise different sets of tools to develop or retain their country’s influence. Although the role of civil society was stressed in Nye’s subsequent works (Nye 2004), it remains treated as

a secondary factor. Such an approach tends to disregard the potential role of powerful private actors with major economic stakes invested in the promotion of a country's influence. Secondly, Nye's theory supposes that promoters of a state's influence have the capacity to mobilise cultural organisations to further their goals. This may be true in the case of cultural centres with organic links to the state, for example, the Yunus Emre cultural centres. However, relatively autonomous organisations like the social media and art world cannot function as instruments of influence (Zaharna 2007).

- 6 Throughout the course of the twentieth century, while the visual arts enjoyed the benefits of state support granted through acquisitions and the institution of the Academy of Fine Arts, the country lacked an art market infrastructure (Pelvanoğlu 2014). Consequently, the emergence of Turkey's art market has been a comparatively recent development: Fifty years ago, it was virtually non-existent with only a few short-lived art galleries referenced before the 1970s. The sale of late-Ottoman and early-Republican paintings by pioneer art dealers, such as Yahşi Baraz (1975) and Aydın Cumalı (1973), thereafter, started to promote a taste for collecting. In the 1980s, many new galleries were established² and auction houses, such as Portakal Kültür ve Sanat Evi and Antik Aş, assumed a central role in the art market. As Yahşi Baraz explained, economic liberalisation measures taken after the 1980 military coup gave rise to the emergence of an art market in Istanbul: "The first collectors started after 1984. It was the first time that art really got bought and sold" (Küçükyıldırım Jan. 26, 2012). However, growth was largely localised and the Turkish art market remained relatively marginalised in the international market with few external promoters. After 2000, events began to change with the proliferation of institutions and the market price boom (Molho 2014). Recent developments within the Istanbul art scene have been less a consequence of public strategy than the venture initiatives and patronage of important industrial families investing in cultural infrastructure (şeni 2010). The Eczacıbaşı family founded the Istanbul Biennial in 1987, which underwent a process of internationalisation and recognition through the progressive invitation of foreign curators and artists and the subsequent attraction of a foreign public. From 2000 investment into Istanbul's art infrastructure soared (Polo 2013). Private museums and foundations were opened such as the museums of Elgiz, Borusan, Pera, Istanbul Modern, Sakıp Sabancı Museum, ARTER, and SALT. In addition, private universities, such as Bilgi and Sabancı, opened programs in cultural and art management, fuelling the scene with professionalised knowledge.
- 7 The growth of the contemporary art market during this period is evidenced by auction sales figures, which increased significantly from eleven to fifty million dollars between 2000 and 2009 (Bakbaşı 2010). This evolution was punctuated by a series of highly mediatised market signals: In December 2004, a record 3.5 million dollar sale was recorded for an Osman Hamdi Bey painting, *The Turtle's Trainer*; and in November 2009, Burhan Doğançay's *Blue Symphony* sold for 1.5 million dollars, constituting the first artwork by a living Turkish artist to exceed the one million dollar mark. Growing international interest in Turkish art has also been evidenced by the organisation of London sales, by Sotheby's from 2009, and the Saatchi gallery from 2011. Favourable market indicators have also resulted in the establishment of dozens of new contemporary art galleries, including galleries opened by collectors such as Leyla Tara Suyabatmaz (Rampa), Oktay Duran (Arton) and Mehveş Arıburnu (Mana). In addition, Turkish galleries are increasingly featured at major world art fairs, including Art Basel

in Basel, Hong Kong and Miami Beach, the Frieze London art fair, and The Armory Show. Internationally renowned galleries such as Marlborough and Yvon Lambert have attended Istanbul art fairs, while foreign galleries like Krampf, New York and Riff, Paris have been opened in Istanbul. The fees for Contemporary Istanbul has increased fivefold within the six-year period following its foundation in 2006, reflecting the rise of its local and international reputation.

- 8 Thus, the growth of the number of collectors and the patronage of institutions is demonstrative of the pivotal role played by the private sector in facilitating the rise of Istanbul's art sector. State actors, however, have not been absent from this process. The presence of political figures, for example, on the boards of art institutions and at museum inauguration ceremonies, demonstrates the beneficial return of prestige from granting support.³ Nevertheless, their relatively secondary role in shaping the direction of the arts sector contradicts the assertion that its rise is related to the strategic enhancement of Turkey's soft power. Attention to the strategies of economic elites profiting from international expansion, however, may help to elucidate the nature of the development of relations in the region. Family holdings, which support the majority of major art institutions in Istanbul, have a vested economic interest in relations with neighbouring countries. The total volume of exports from Turkey to the Middle East increased from six to sixteen percent between 2002 and 2010, while tourist figures increased from 975,000 to 3.6 million in the same period (Habibi and Walker 2011). The trend suggests that economic ties are strengthened correlative to artistic ties. A primary example may be offered by the case of the Sabancı group, who are the majority shareholders of Akbank and significant benefactors of the Istanbul arts sector through Akbank Sanat, the Sakıp Sabancı museum and the sponsorship of events such as Contemporary Istanbul. In 2009, Akbank opened a branch in Dubai. During the inauguration event, the Chairperson of Akbank, Suzan Dinçer Sabancı, met with the head of the Dubai Culture Authority and the owner of Cuadro, a Dubai gallery that represents two Turkish artists, Devrim Erbil and Ali Taptık [Figure 1].⁴ In 2013, Akbank supported a partnership between Contemporary Istanbul and Art Dubai, an occasion that was positioned towards the development of a new art consumer market. Therefore, events are organised as an opportunity to promote Sabancı's involvement in the art market: "We constantly share information about art markets and new art tendencies with our clients; and we aim to satisfy their varied demands... We – Akbank Private Banking – have been supporting Contemporary Art for eleven years."⁵ Thus, for Akbank, art is regarded as an instrument for the development of a niche clientele base in Dubai.

Figure 1

Inauguration of Akbank Dubai Branch attended by Suzan Sabancı and figures from the Dubai art world.

<http://www.rawajinternational.com/akbank/>

- 9 An additional example illustrating the complex entwining of economic and creative interests may be offered by the case of architect Murat Tabanlıoğlu, owner of Istanbul's pioneer gallery, Galerist, and an important figure in the Istanbul art world having designed Istanbul Modern and represented Turkey at the Venice Architecture Biennale, 2014. Tabanlıoğlu involvement in the art scene of the Gulf region has been negotiated through his architectural company: In 2007, his was the first Turkish gallery to attend the launch of Art Dubai; and in 2008, he received two prizes at the Cityscape architectural competition in Dubai.
- 10 Such examples suggest that private actors support the art world for the promotion of their economic interests. However, suggesting that this represents a form of "private soft power" remains an insufficient explanatory basis for analysing the complex regional dynamics that constitute Istanbul's art world. Although the convergence of actors from different spheres of interest would seem to lend credence to the argument that the art world functions as an instrument of corporate interests (Artun 2011), critical analysis stresses the relative autonomy of the art field (Heinich 2004). As Velthuis states, the art market is "based on the production of belief" (Velthuis 2011: 37). Until the nineteenth century, it may be argued that academic norms prevailed in the establishment of values of artworks. However, the art world has progressively evolved into a complex intersubjective system (Beckert and Rössel 2013). Initially, the economics of the art world seems to be regulated through the strict distribution of functions: Theoretically, artists focus on conceiving and producing artworks while galleries assume responsibility for their reputation. In practice, however, artists undertake an active role in self-marketing. Furthermore, in principle the commercial and institutional spheres remain separate: Commercial actors, such as dealers and auction houses, act as intermediaries between artists and collectors and construct economic values; Art institutions, museums, and biennials make art accessible to the general public and determine the qualification of artistic innovation through the

construction of aesthetic values. Yet boundaries between functions are often blurry: Artists organise sales, gallery owners curate non-profit exhibitions, collectors fund art galleries, and museums play a central role in market value.

- 11 Sociologists of contemporary art have argued that a hierarchy of reputation is responsible for regulating the system. Thornton's *Seven Days in the Art World* (2012) describes the contribution of rituals to the formation of a social hierarchy of status: Artists competing for the prestigious Turner prize; galleries fighting over the best spot at the Art Basel fair. This hierarchy of status extends to collectors and curators. Collectors not only compete for the ownership of artworks produced by prestigious artists, but they also try to hold strategic positions within influential art institutions. The role of a curator extends beyond the organisation of exhibitions to encompass an expectation of affirmed authorship and the demonstration of originality (Heinich 2014). Moreover, the hierarchy of status and reputation is institutionalised through prestigious events (e.g. the Venice Biennial and the Art Basel fair) and mediated through rankings in listings. For example, Art Review's Power 100 rates people's comparative influence on the global art market, and the *Kunstkompass* listing ranks artists based on their presence in important museums. Despite various biases, these rankings are both influential and performative (Quemin 2015): The hierarchy of prestige generates a self-perpetuating logic.
- 12 The hierarchy of prestige is also highly influential in terms of the spatialisation of the global art market. Studies have suggested a centre-periphery logic to the spatial organisation of networks of relations in the art world (see Quemin 2006; Plattner 1998).⁶ However, this raises the question of how a given territory, either a city or a wider region, can assume a central position in the art field. Drawing on an understanding of the art world as a complex intersubjective system, one can infer that the formation of an art centre results not only from hard factors, but is dependent on the production of cognitive frames. Based on a study of art centres at the time of the Renaissance, Castelfnuovo & Ginzburg (1981) identified the main characteristics shared by major art centres, including: a large number of artists; capital accumulation fuelled investment; institutions; and a varied public. The role of major art theorists, such as Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), in the creation of the symbolic centrality of certain cities was also stressed. Vasari, considered to be the pioneer of art history after the publication of his book *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* in 1550, neglected the emergence of artistic innovations from other Renaissance centres, such as Venice, through his overemphasis on the role of Florentine painters. Thus, conferral of art centre status relies on the construction of cognitive frames produced by actors. I argue that through the process of framing, actors try to affect the perceptions on the relative importance of place to the art world in order to justify their strategic aims and to enhance their own reputations.
- 13 The concept of frames enables an understanding of the way in which the construction of ideas can shape social experience. Initially introduced by Erving Goffman (1974), the concept gave rise to a cognitive approach towards analysing the role of discourse in organising social experience and giving meaning to events (Surel 2000). As Entman (1993: 53) argues, "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text". Through the analysis of speeches or news reports the method identifies which information a communicator is trying to make more *salient*, that is "more noticeable, meaningful and memorable to audiences"

(Entman 1993: 53). Critical attention to the analysis of rhetorical techniques focuses particularly on the way in which specific audiences are targeted through the use of culturally familiar symbols. Although the spatial dimension was not the primary concern of these initial contributions, subsequent works have focused on the framing of space and place. Firstly, through the analysis of the “social construction of scales” geographers have not only applied the concept of framing to spatial issues, but have discussed the centrality of space to understanding the cognitive constructions of a social problem. According to Moore, “Framing the spatial and temporal context is central to the ultimate success of any political project” (Moore 2008: 218). Secondly, a geographic perspective on framing responds to the way in which the circulation of images and discourses may affect our perceptions of space. This is exemplified in Debarbieux *et al*’s study of the circulation of nineteenth century traveller images and the rise of the frame of exoticism: “Exoticism is characterised on the one hand by the association of geographical distance and the existence of a symbolical gap, on the other hand by the enhanced value of otherness, seen as charming and attractive” (Debarbieux *et al* 2012: 88). Framing, therefore, deals with the perception of a territory: It involves the selection of a territory and the process of making salient certain aspects of it, for example, its physical characteristics, history, or the social activities that are taking place. Martin (2003) coined the term “place-framing”, to emphasise the performative effect of framing on community mobilisation:

As discourses that reveal ideologies about activism and place, frames have material consequences both in shaping people’s ideas about places and in fostering social action. While some collective-action frames are aimed primarily at motivating activism among members, frames affect external perspectives of a community as well (Martin 2003: 733).

- 14 In the case of Istanbul, the place-framing process shares two comparable aims: The mobilisation of a diverse range of actors (institutions, galleries, artists, collectors) at local and international levels; and altering the perception of the art world as one orientated around Western centres by framing other emerging regions and art centres.
- 15 The regional dynamics of Istanbul’s art world cannot be restricted to an analysis of underlying national or corporate interests alone. Neither state actors nor patrons are able to fully control the transnational interactions occurring within the Istanbul art scene. The construction of cognitive frames within the art world plays a key role in shaping collective actions and perceptions. As the purveyors of funds, patrons and states may be influential in the development of international links, but they do so in negotiation with a range of other actors, including museums, galleries, auction houses, and art fair organisations. What I define as the “soft power of framing” refers to the capacity of these players to construct a discourse for the mobilisation of other actors at various levels and challenge the perception of the geographical distribution of symbolic power. The remainder of the paper explores how the combination of frames constructed by different actors has contributed to a view of Istanbul as a regional art centre.

II. Framing emerging regions in a globalising art market

- 16 In the last fifteen years, the globalisation of the art market has created a radical geographic shift (Velthuis and Curioni 2015). In emerging countries auction prices have skyrocketed, dozens of art fairs have been created globally, and cities, formerly viewed as peripheral areas, have built major art institutions and hosted numerous art gallery events. International auction houses and art fair organisations have been at the centre of this shift. They have been responsible for shaping the perceptions and experiences of space within the art world, contributing both to a regionalised and polarised understanding of the international art market.
- 17 The globalisation of the art market has also been responsible for the development of auction houses and art fairs as major art market platforms. Between 1986 and 2011, the growth revenue of the two main auction houses, Christie's and Sotheby's, increased from 403 million to 3.6 billion Pounds Sterling; and from 898 million to 4.9 billion US Dollars respectively (McAndrew 2012). Previously confined to the secondary market, they have progressively become more consequential, undertaking a broader remit in the market as retail providers by developing aggressive marketing strategies towards collectors and through the establishment of branches in emerging markets. In addition, the number of art fairs gathering multiple art galleries for a shorter period of time has developed significantly, accounting for more than half of art gallery revenues (McAndrew 2012). These fairs have constituted a platform for extending into emerging art market areas. The company that owns the most prestigious art fair, Art Basel, for example, opened branches in Miami, 2001, focusing on Latin American art; and in Hong Kong, 2011, targeting the Asian market. The space-framing approaches promoted by auction houses and art fair organisations in Istanbul and its surrounding region will be critically examined in the following section. On the one hand, global auction houses frame the Middle East as an emerging regional art market, grouping together a wide variety of nationally segmented markets for sales. On the other hand, art fair organisations have tapped into this rising regional frame to legitimate their position as a central hub between these segmented markets.

International auction houses and the regional segmentation of the international art market

- 18 Professional art market literature, which largely publishes information on auction sales data (e.g. Artprice), now widely diffuses a vision of the art world as the juxtaposition of regional art markets. As a contributor to the emerging region of the Middle East, this new geographic framing has led to the inclusion of Turkey. Gulf countries have played an increasingly expansive role in the production of interest in "Middle Eastern art". While Dubai remains the Gulf's affirmed art market centre, other Gulf countries, including Bahrain, Qatar, as well as Sharjah and Abu Dhabi of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), have been steadily investing in art institutions, therefore, becoming strong market buyers. In Abu Dhabi the Saadiyat Cultural District project announced in 2006, designated a land area of 2,800,000 square meters to house a series of widely mediated museum projects designed by international star architects, including: the Louvre Abu Dhabi by Pritzker Prize winning architect, Jean Nouvel; the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi by

Frank Gehry; the Zayed National Museum by Pritzker Prize winning architect, Lord Norman Foster; and the Performing Arts Center by Zaha Hadid. In addition to buying Cézanne's *Card Players* for an excess of 250 million dollars in 2011, Qatar has also attracted a lot of attention by appointing Edward Dolman, Christie's CEO, as executive director of the Qatar Museums (formerly the Qatar Museums Authority). In 2013, Art Review rated its chairperson, Sheikha Al Mayassa as the most powerful figure in the international art market. Such initiatives can be analysed within the regional geopolitical context (Kazerouni 2014), and have laid the foundations for framing the Middle East as a rising art market region.

- 19 Since the establishment of Christie's in 2005 and Bonham's two years later, Dubai has been positioned as the art market hub of the region. Following its institution, Christie's sales have generated local interest, encouraging businessmen to turn towards the art market and driving up market prices (Moghadam 2012). In the dissemination of the discourse of the rise of the "Middle Eastern art scene", Christie's has actively mobilised the press. The rapid development of the art market sector in Dubai was quoted by the director of Christie's in *Gulf News*, a Dubai based newspaper, to be an indicator of the dynamism of the region: "In Dubai, where there were only five art galleries a decade ago, we now have eighty-five. New museums and galleries are being built in the region. There are art fairs in Beirut, Morocco, Dubai and Abu Dhabi. People of this region are investing in art." Three years later, *Gulf News* ran an article headlined, "Dubai vital selling centre to world art market says Christie's." Citing Michael Jeha, the managing director for the Middle East, the article referenced Christie's generation of 250 million dollars of sales and the statement that Dubai "attracts buyers from more than thirty countries underlining the popularity of Middle Eastern Art globally" (Jaspal April 24, 2015). Dubai has played a major role in spreading the idea of a Middle Eastern art scene. They have responded to the comparatively small amount of local artistic production by situating it as a hub for Arab, Iranian, and Turkish art.⁸ The presence of Dubai galleries at the Art Basel fair was commented upon by the co-director of Art Basel, Marc Spiegler, to be an indicator of the development of the arts sector of the region: "The fact that you have two galleries from the UAE points to the growth of the region in terms of its artists, galleries, institutions, and private collectors" (Esposito June 12, 2012).
- 20 The proactive role of Christie's in disseminating the frame of the Middle Eastern art originates from its corporate strategy. A comparison of the regional strategies of the world's leading auction houses, Christie's and Sotheby's, reveals the contingent nature of regional framing. Christie's opened a branch in Dubai, 2005; and Sotheby's opened branches in Doha, 2008, and Istanbul, 2009, although neither company organises contemporary art sales in Istanbul. Christie's Dubai sales have included Turkish, Iranian, and Arab artists, while Sotheby's sales in Doha comprise mainly Arab and Western artists. Although Sotheby's organised London sales exclusively dedicated to Turkish art between 2009 and 2011, the decision to include Turkey alongside other countries, including Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, marked a change in strategy. These broader country groupings are directed towards tapping into a wider market potential. The map of the regional groupings of Christie's and Sotheby's art sales highlights the fact that Istanbul is not considered to be a regional sales hub [Figure 2]. Location choices are dependent on the capacity of cities to provide competitive advantages in terms of its taxation and

customs regulations and art trade infrastructure. Lower trade barriers and a more efficient customs systems mark Dubai and London as the more attractive prospect.

Figure 2

The inclusion of Turkish contemporary art in auction sales in Dubai and London

Jeremie Molho, 2015⁹

- 21 In order to justify the geographic segmentation of the international art market, auction houses produce what has been defined above as space frames: A discourse that renders certain elements geographical realities more salient than others. In a Sotheby's press release for its selling exhibition of contemporary art, *At the Crossroads 2*, promoters emphasised the common cultural backgrounds and historical trajectories shared by the countries included in their sales:

At The Crossroads 2 will explore the relationship between this diverse group of contemporary artists and examine how their shared political and cultural past has influenced the art being produced in the region today. While the turbulent socio-political changes of the twentieth century and the disintegration of the USSR has dramatically influenced artistic production, the contemporary identity of the region also stems from a rich history of artistic practices dating back to antiquity - from the production of delicate Persian miniatures and Azerbaijani carpets to Ottoman architecture, ancient Georgian frescoes, and Central Asian jewellery and crafts.¹⁰

- 22 Despite the commerciality of an auction sale, it was necessary for Sotheby's to legitimise their choices through discursively constructed references to shared political, historical, and cultural traditions that framed the countries as a coherent regional whole. Sotheby's space-framing makes actual cultural interactions more salient. Similarly, Christie's Istanbul representative underlines the similarities between historical periods of Arab and Turkish art:

From a cultural point of view, these are two cultures that can communicate. Turkish art and Egyptian art have lived through very similar times, their opening to

the West. A Turkish sales catalogue looks more like a Dubai catalogue than a London Catalogue, especially for modern art... We have a 600-year-old past of the Ottoman Empire. For centuries we have been under the same umbrella. From a cultural point of view it's not the same thing because the Ottoman Empire did not have a very directive cultural policy, but they have been influenced by the same culture. Iran, Mesopotamia have their own cultures, but there were relationships.¹¹

- 23 The argument is derived from a conception of the development of modern painting as a consequence of the process of westernisation beginning in the nineteenth century that has been systematically emphasised in the historiography of Turkish arts. While agents of this “modernisation” movement are typically remembered as facilitating a break with Middle Eastern culture, Christie’s representative argues that Arab societies experienced an analogous process of westernisation. My aim is not to discuss these particular perspectives of history, but rather uncover the discursive mechanisms that are being employed by their use.
- 24 The understanding diffused by auction houses of a global art market geographically segmented into regions is grounded in contingent cognitive constructions. These space-frames are the product of the commercial strategies of auction house companies. Their primary objective is to access the newly created wealth of the region through the provision of specifically targeted goods. Analysis of the way in which Sotheby’s and Christie’s rationalise the organisation of their regional sales indicates their capacity to elaborate appropriate discourses for their intended audiences.

Art fairs and the framing of Istanbul as a regional hub

- 25 Although the upward trend in art auction sales has been largely concentrated in the Gulf and Turkey, Istanbul’s surrounding region has largely been a dynamic area of development. With the exception of Art Athina founded in 1993, the majority of galleries and art fairs were established in the last decade [Figure 3].¹² Comparably, Istanbul also developed many new art fairs, the most important of which are considered to be Contemporary Istanbul and Artinternational in terms of their international network.¹³ These new art fairs have constituted platforms of exchange, enabling the promotion and movement of artists between Istanbul and the broader region. Indeed, many events have been organised with this particular focus in mind.¹⁴

Figure 3

Jeremie Molho, 2014¹⁵

- 26 International art fairs participate in the framing of regional art markets. Artinternational, established in Istanbul, 2013, was explicitly positioned as a regional platform.¹⁶ Despite the pre-existence of a competing international contemporary art fair, Istanbul was the selected location. While the dynamism of the city was stated as a motivating factor, the potential of the region was considered critical:

The geographic potential, the possibility of reaching Europe, the Middle East and also Eastern Europe, the ex-Soviet Republics, Central Asia, Russia... There is the cliché that [Istanbul] is the meeting point between East and West, but in more concrete terms, it's a four-hour flight to about fifty countries. So it can grow into a space where diverse types of regions come together.¹⁷

- 27 Not only was the centrality of the location considered an advantage, but a strategy was put in place to ensure that the fair was established as a regional networking event. The selection of the committee was integral to its strategic implementation: Eleven of the twenty-three members were related to the Middle Eastern art scene, as opposed to eight with affiliations to Turkey and four to other countries; and members names were intended to act as a draw to collectors from the region. In addition, they worked alongside VIP representatives in order to utilise their contacts with Middle Eastern collectors to encourage attendance.

If you wanted to join the fair you saw that there was somebody like Dyala who is involved with the Middle East, there are VIP relations with the Middle East, there is Leila Heller¹⁸ on the selection committee. So I'm sure that there were some people like this gallery in San Francisco who looked at it and said, ok, we're gonna bring our artists from that part of the world or who deal with Islamic themes. Both of its galleries were approached because they would fit the theme and also because they proposed something that they thought could work in the region. The Middle Eastern aspect of the fair was kind of in the way that it was presented and marketed, so the galleries picked up on that when they decided if they were going to attend and once they had been accepted, which artists they should bring.¹⁹

- 28 Through the production of several signals, the fair constituted itself as an attractive meeting point for actors specialised in the Middle Eastern art scene, thereby performatively contributing to the legitimization of its existence. Reference to the Middle East as a “theme” in the above-cited excerpt, demonstrates the equation of the region with specific subjects. To be selected and achieve commercial success at the fair, applicant galleries were encouraged to participate in the framing of the Middle Eastern art scene. Paula Al Askari, an Abu Dhabi collector and selection committee member, argues that the fair constituted a juncture for the Turkish and UAE art scenes: “It does seem like the entire art community of the UAE is going to Istanbul... Art fairs are playing a really strong role in developing the sense of a Middle Eastern art scene, which has expanded to include non-Arab countries in recent years” (East Sept. 14, 2013). Competitor art fair, Contemporary Istanbul, also adopted a similar position towards the region, underlining their intent to combine internationality with locality:

We believe the assets of the local culture should not to be effaced by the uniform, homogenous global culture. Aligning ourselves to the values in the last eight years, we gathered not only galleries from across the world but also hosted countries like Gulf Countries, Eastern European Countries and this year Russia. Thus highlighting the unique glocal idiosyncrasy (the character) of Contemporary Istanbul as not only an art fair, but a cultural platform.²⁰

- 29 Art fairs are anxious not to present themselves as solely commercial events. Beyond acting as a platform for the sale and acquisition of artworks, art fairs represent themselves as forums of dialogue and exchange, for example, through the organisation of talks and non-profit sections. Discourse opposing the homogenisation of global culture, however, can be regarded as somewhat paradoxical having originated from a symbolic representative of the globalisation of arts. In fact, Contemporary Istanbul’s strategic emphasis on its regional embeddedness serves as a means of differentiating Istanbul as an art centre in the global market. The strategic focus on regional art scene, therefore, operates as a marketing tool.
- 30 In opposition to national segmentation, both international auction houses and art fairs contribute to advancing the vision of a regionalised art market in order to expand their potential customer pool. This observable marketing strategy accompanies a discourse that aims to change the perception of other art market actors. Firstly, international auction houses have been at the forefront of regional segmentation – and particularly the construction of the Middle East as an art market area – through the mobilisation of accessible historical references for local and international audiences. Secondly, international art fairs have reacted by situating themselves as a cultural bridge. By adopting the idea of separation between the Western and Middle Eastern art markets, they have legitimated their market position while simultaneously granting a performative existence to the frame of a regionalised art market.

III. Constructing Istanbul as a regional art centre

- 31 After emphasising the promotion of regional framing by agents of globalisation in the art market, the way in which this frame is adopted and performed within the Istanbul art world will be considered. Art galleries and institutions demonstrate the will to combine local support with their extension of external relations. As discussed above, place-framing not only attends to changing perceptions, but also the mobilisation of

local actors around a common vision. I argue that the development of a regional frame gathering the commercial and institutional spheres of the Istanbul art world is demonstrative of the mutual intent behind the construction of Istanbul as an international art centre. To achieve this objective, support given to a regional understanding of the art market has appeared to constitute the formative step.

- 32 Adoption of this position firstly serves to oppose the processes of peripheralisation resulting from an asymmetrical power relationship with the Western art world. Albeit, there remains a risk that local and external collectors have more faith in Western produced art, as may be inferred from the comments of a collector actively involved in supporting the Istanbul art scene: “Our objective is still this: To have our artists recognised in Europe, to have them invited to Documenta, to have them bought by MoMA, by Tate. Nobody says ‘Wow! He was bought in Dubai!’”.²¹ Secondly, regionalisation implies a rise in transnational interactions and contributes to the internationalisation of the Istanbul art scene. In the absence of regional frames local audiences may remain nationally focused, and pursue a patriotic approach to collection, as the owner of Galeri Zilberman in Istanbul explains:

Iranians, Emiratis, Iraqis support a lot of their artists... I can see it clearly. In New York or in London, when an artist from the Eastern part of the world opens an exhibition, the diaspora of China, India or wherever they come from are there, and they buy, they support... Each person supports the artists from their own countries. That’s how the market is working.²²

- 33 Obstacles to the trade of contemporary artworks arise less from customs restrictions than from the lack of an arts based discourse. Galleries and institutions are required to mediate interactions by framing the regional art scene and legitimating it from a creative standpoint. This process represents the preliminary route through which the trust of collectors is secured. Such considerations have led galleries and institutions to produce a discourse of cultural proximity between the art scenes of Istanbul and the Middle East alongside a discourse of emancipation from Western cultural hegemony.

Art Galleries: The construction of cultural proximity

- 34 The vast majority of art galleries in Istanbul are primarily dedicated to supporting local Turkish artists and targeting local collectors. Concomitantly, the latter have been increasingly regarding the development of internationally focused activities as an asset. Although often reluctant to work alongside local auction houses, some Istanbul galleries consider proposing artworks in international auctions as a more beneficial means of broadening their collector base. According to Christie’s representative in Istanbul, eighty-five to ninety-five percent of Turkish artworks sent to Dubai are sold to non-Turkish buyers. The director of CAM gallery, Istanbul, explained that being listed in a Christie’s catalogue enabled her to gain visibility and develop relations with collectors from the Gulf: “Christie’s has made a sale in Dubai under the label ‘Middle East’ with Iran and Turkey. It’s there that they see our artists; it’s there that their attention is attracted. Then they come to the fairs or they come by themselves.”²³ Thus, the creation of a broad regional label for the transfer of artworks for external sale in Dubai facilitates an opportunity for Istanbul galleries to gain access to a foreign collector base. Moreover, it offers a viable alternative to participating in the more costly art fairs abroad.

- 35 The majority of Istanbul's leading art galleries have utilised multiple routes for the development of links with the Middle East, including participation in art fairs, partnering with galleries, and representing artists from across the region.²⁴ The artistic director of Galerist describes Dubai as evocative of a niche for Turkish galleries due to its cultural proximity. In contrast to the Art Hong Kong fair, a prestigious but highly competitive event, Art Dubai is regarded to provide a more opportune occasion for participants:

Dubai is great, it provides a great space for networking. It's a small fair, but it has a good collector base and a lot of institutions come, probably because they want to see something different from what they see in Europe, and because even European galleries bring different art to Dubai... It's easier to be seen. We used to go to Art Hong Kong. There are 250 galleries. Most of them are huge galleries. You get a lot of Asian collectors, but it's very hard to establish any kind of communication with them and it's very hard to be seen among so many galleries.²⁵

- 36 Positioning themselves as part of a Middle Eastern art scene is, therefore, a means of differentiation, enabling them to more easily reach international institutions intent on investing in "Middle Eastern art" because of a perceived need to diversify their collections. In the terms of Galerist's art director, being featured in Dubai facilitates the conditions for targeting wealthy regional collectors. The popularity of Turkey in the Middle East, a benefit of so-called Turkish soft power, is argued to offer a competitive advantage:

In the last five years, Turkey has become this regional power. It's not just politically, but also culturally. For example, when we go to Dubai, we get a lot of interest, people say: "Oh! You're from Turkey!" They know all of our TV series, all the singers. Turkey has become culturally influential in the area.²⁶

- 37 As part of an expression of interest in an art gallery, this "influence" may be regarded as a means of more readily instilling buyer confidence, an essential component of purchasing decisions. The owner of Galeri Zilberman represents the development of links with the Middle East as the strategic derivative of cultural proximity.²⁷ However, while Galerist's director refers to the commercial advantages of cultural proximity, Zilberman stakes his interest as a collector of art:

It is a strategy because I believe that we have a strong cultural, geographic, and historic relationship. We are very comfortable when we go there, for fairs or for anything else, and I find that we are very close to them... In the art of the Middle East, what interests me the most is political art, and especially photograph and videos by artists doing political art ... I think that in photography and video the best artists in the world are from the Middle East, because they have the social resources and impressions, which is not the case anymore in the West. I feel closer to the subjects that are being treated.²⁸

- 38 Given the emotive nature of art commerce, a personal connection to the issues being addressed can be a potent incentive for buying. Although galleries generally assert the universality of an artist's work, they can also draw on the associations of proximity to establish an emotional connectivity with potential buyers.
- 39 Middle Eastern gallery owners have argued that the Istanbul art market more readily accommodates alternative visual media compared to other areas in the region. The exhibition of a one video installation by a Palestinian artist was reasoned by the owner of the Green Art Gallery, Syria, to have constituted a risky move in the context of an unready Middle Eastern market, despite its showing at the Venice Biennale. He feels more confident with the Turkish market: "Istanbul has a lot of private collections that

go for such conceptual and video work” (Lord Nov. 24, 2011). The director of The Empty Quarter gallery, Dubai, specialising in fine art photography, similarly explained that “The Turkish collector base for photography is much wider than the Gulf” (*Ibid.*). The openness of local collectors to artworks that do not appear to be immediately commercial, suggests the comparative maturity of the Turkish art market and its institutions. This leads Dirimart’s director to state that the development of links between Istanbul and the Middle East are part of the broader process of internationalisation and the resulting expansion of Istanbul’s art scene, rather than being a regionally directed strategy towards certain growth areas. Accordingly, a direct correlation is perceived between participation and partnerships with foreign galleries and fairs, and the successful receipt of Turkish art in Gulf countries. At the same time, the view of Istanbul as an emerging centre also offers a competitive market advantage. The director of CAM gallery, Istanbul, argues that interest in Turkish art by Middle Eastern collectors is invested because of an anticipated rise in value:

They see Istanbul as a fresh market, they come and say “can I have a piece of this cake?”... When I look at their sales catalogues, I see that what we exhibit is good if you compare it. Our prices are low compared to theirs. I have seen things there worth 300 or 500 thousand dollars that I would never exhibit in my life... So it is possible that they think in a speculative way. Now our prices are good. In the future, it will grow. And they buy.²⁹

- 40 The way in which art galleries frame increasing ties between Istanbul and the Middle East relies on mutual interest and the argument of cultural proximity. The perception of proximity extends beyond a similarity in tastes to encompass similarities between the experiences of collectors. Proximity is advanced as an argument of trust, a necessary component of art investment. But beyond proximity, the ability of galleries and their artists to gain the international recognition of prestigious art institutions continues to provide an important market signal. Framing Istanbul as part of an emerging market region constitutes an opening step towards the affirmation of Istanbul as an art centre. This framing has developed through the endeavours of actors trying to broaden their market base. In the process of penetrating new markets several emerging countries have been grouped together based on considerations of geographic and cultural proximity; and selected specific cities to act as springboards for reaching potential new collector communities. Art galleries have been active in the regionalisation of the Istanbul art scene. Initially developed for commercial reasons, exchanges with the surrounding region have been framed as the result of cultural proximity.

Art Institutions: Istanbul as an alternative voice in the international art world

- 41 Art institutions play an essential role in the consecration of an artist’s reputation and in the construction of artistic values. The location of norm-setting institutions is critical to understanding the hierarchy of art centres. Despite the recognition of the importance of emerging regions on the international art market, many analysts contend that the historical dominance of Western institutions remains unaltered (Quemin 2006; Choron-Baix and Mermier 2012). A small number of Western art institutions, such as MoMa in New York, the Tate Modern in London, and the Centre Pompidou in Paris, continue to retain their authority for recognising and bestowing the

standard of artistic merit. Therefore, challenging the cultural hegemony of these institutions through alternative vocabularies has constituted a core issue in affirming new art centre status. The globalisation of the art world occurred in conjunction with the proliferation of new city biennials:³⁰ There are currently 161 biennials listed on the International Biennial Association map: Thirty-nine in the Asia Pacific region, eighteen in Africa and the Middle East, and sixteen in Latin America. Countries falling outside the remit of so-called artistic centres have been at the forefront of this “biennialisation” movement. Nevertheless, the authority of the Venice Biennale or Documenta in Kassel, Germany, for example, remains intact due to the continued draw of their worldwide visibility and capacity to establish norms. Thus, the issue of “decentring” the art world is not dependent on increasing trade or establishing new institutions. Rather, it is tethered to the ability of actors to create new frames that challenge the authority of the “centre” by offering new alternative centres that are positioned to express artistic forms and ideas that find little space elsewhere. These issues have been engaged with as part of the Havana, Gwangju, and Johannesburg biennials. Havana was the first to definitively promote non-Western artists (Rojas-Sotelo 2011). These “Biennials of resistance” aimed to provide a platform for questioning the authority of Western art centres. To do so, they asserted the affirmation of new areas by claiming their autonomy and cultural specificity:

A network of sites of cultural production sharing common questions, themes, and, indeed, a common precariousness ... these platforms take their stand on the ground of newly evolving regionalities – whether mobilised under the sign of Latin American and Caribbean solidarity, of Afro-Asian unity, of a post-Cold War position of Asia-Pacific solidarity (Hoskote 2010: 312).

- 42 Thus, the lack of representation in the international art world and the issue of recognition provided the powerful impetus for areas to participate in the framing of the emergence of new regions.
- 43 The occasion of the Istanbul Biennial generated considerable debate concerning relations with the West and the legacy of cultural hegemony. From the beginning, the East-West and Local-International dialectic was stressed. The biennial was presented and marketed as a bridge between East and West, using the symbolic charge of Istanbul. It gathered Turkish and international artists and curators. But this positioning triggered discussions. Tomur Atagök and Susan Platt (2001) have questioned the way in which artists from the Middle East like Shirin Neshat and Kutluğ Ataman were shown at the Biennial. They argued that the Biennial served to perpetuate the logic of cultural hegemony by presenting artworks that could be easily understood, hampering the expression of the complexity of local issues for the production of a “digestible other”. They used the Biennial as an opening to challenge the influence of cultural hegemony: “An ongoing and unresolved heritage of ‘Orientalism’ in which Turkey is still defined in terms of the erotic, the alien and the dangerous ‘other’ that is threatening to Europe, at the same time that it holds valuable resources that Europe is eager to exploit” (Atagök and Platt 2001: 103). Criticism of the Istanbul Biennial, develops a Gramscian approach towards the denunciation of cultural hegemony. In the nineteenth century, hegemony denoted the influence of the European colonial powers in terms of their coercive control and cultural authority. In the twentieth century, Gramsci’s cultural hegemony concept transcended the notion of the cultural domination of one state over another to denounce the transnational cultural influence of the ruling class in the legitimisation and maintenance of its material domination. As a critical mirror to Nye’s soft power,

the concept of cultural hegemony has been used to question the legacy of Western influence in Turkey. Edward Said drew on a Gramscian approach to describe the construction of the East-West dichotomy in Western hegemonic discourse on the “Oriental”. Established during the period of colonial expansion, its legacy is argued to have persisted beyond World War 2 through formal and informal cultural institutions (Said 1993). Gramscian theory, following Marxism carries an emancipatory goal for the mobilisation of people against the authority of Western cultural institutions. The Istanbul Biennial, while perpetrating the East-West dichotomy, provided a platform for its discussion and identification as an observable frame in local and international discourse. Yet, the Istanbul Biennial also afforded an opportunity for the Istanbul art world to represent itself as a viable alternative. Beral Madra, director of the first two Biennials in 1987 and 1989, gave a speech in 2011, asserting its innovative status in developing biennial practice:

They successfully opposed the idea of a national pavilion, which was the prevalent form of biennial organisation at the time. Istanbul was pioneering as a regional biennial. It was not until the 1990s that a similar approach would be implemented at the Venice Biennale. Thus, the Istanbul Biennial, founded ninety years after the Venice Biennale, placed not only Turkey, but also the post-Soviet region and the Middle East on the seemingly inaccessible great map and changed their fate of remaining on the “periphery.” (Madra 2011: 32)

- 44 Discourse on the historical influence of the Istanbul Biennial contributes towards the framing of Istanbul as a regional art centre by explicitly denouncing cultural hegemony and countering the view of the region as a peripheral geography.
- 45 Furthermore, the adoption of a Gramscian critique of the international art world has also encouraged institutional actors in Istanbul to question the construction of the history of Turkish art. Birkan (2011) argues that the history of the arts in Turkey has emphasised the influence of the West. The period between the late-nineteenth mid-twentieth century is presented as a series of importations of techniques and styles ranging from Orientalism, to Cubism and Impressionism. The orientation of cultural policies towards the West in the Republican era is remembered as resulting in a correlative process of disassociation from Middle Eastern culture, disregarded by Atatürk as “a composition of legends, which is an inheritance of a lost empire” (Quoted in Korad Birkiye 2009: 262). Thus, the creation of ties with other contemporary arts scenes from around the region can be interpreted as part of the endeavour to challenge the dominance of this frame.
- 46 In Istanbul the main figurehead of this changing perspective is Vasif Kortun, the curator of two Biennials in Istanbul and the current director of the Garanti Bank foundation, SALT, which has developed projects with Township art galleries in Cairo and Ashkal Alwan, Beirut.³¹ Kortun’s decision to work with actors from the Balkans and Middle East has contributed to the construction of a cognitive frame that aims to facilitate a rupture with the Western aesthetic. Such discourse relies on a critique of the ideology of Turkey’s modernisation. Vasif Kortun asserts that “Twentieth Century Istanbul was a mistake.”³² The manager of the non-profit organisation *Collector Space*, who worked with Kortun in the 2000s before becoming involved with several organisations in the Middle East adopts a similar stance:

The modernisation process or period starting from the mid-nineteenth century, kept referring back to Germany and France in the literary circles, in the visual arts circles... a collective amnesia has happened. The ties either towards Eastern Europe

or the Arab states, all these ties of close proximity were lost in the twentieth century.³³

- 47 While Western cultural hegemony is blamed for having weakened Istanbul's relationship to the region, specific reference to "amnesia" is used to signify the parallel processes of modernisation and negation of collective memory. Kortun explains that his actions at SALT were directed against the vertical representation of the art world into centres and peripheries:

Originally, our goal was to have a horizontal, lateral relationship with neighbours. Before the 1990s, artistic discourse was ordered vertically. Before the 1950s there was Paris, then there was New York. That's where you looked. You would never look at Amman. Even Sophia was a billion miles away. People who thought they were on the periphery had much more to share together than with a supposed centre.³⁴

- 48 However, Kortun criticises the current hierarchy while simultaneously maintaining a polarised conception of the art world. Rather than rejecting any form of hierarchy, a hierarchy of prestige is combined with a hierarchy of geographic distancing. Regional links are viewed as a way of affirming Istanbul as a potentially alternative new pole. Kortun proceeds by way of referencing Istanbul's imperial legacy as the former Ottoman capital:

Istanbul is becoming a new type of city. It's the hub, it has regained its historical place, which is a capital city, which is an empire city ... There is a general feeling about that. It's been one of the most important cities in the world, it's been the centre of the Middle East and the Black sea region. It's becoming big again in tourism. It's on the migratory patterns of people. It has come back to its powerful historical position. It's obvious that it has been at the centre of empires for 2000 years. That's what Istanbul is, that's what Istanbul will be.³⁵

- 49 While an appeal appears to be initially made for the criticism of a hierarchical approach to the art world, a call for the reconfiguration of the hierarchical order is actually being asserted. The framing of Istanbul as a regional art centre is ambivalent: On the one hand, it mobilises a Gramscian critique of Western cultural hegemony to criticise imperial legacies; On the other hand, the vocabulary used to promote the rise of Istanbul explicitly reiterates the city's imperial legacy. The installation of SALT in the Ottoman bank building in Karaköy, 2011, lends a performative dimension to this discourse. The building carries with it the heritage of its former function of funding the infrastructural development of the Middle East. The logical consequence of this discourse of rebirth is the recovery of relations between the former Ottoman provinces. As Kortun elucidates: "I'm in Istanbul so I'm part of the Middle East, I can't close myself to the region. I cannot close myself to Cairo, Amman, Lebanon. It's a priority, because of historical allegiances, relationships, common memories."³⁶ Kortun's vocabulary is reminiscent of the discourse of Turkish soft power. Analogous to Ahmet Davutoglu's *Strategic Depth* doctrine, the creation of an opening with the surrounding region is justified through historical and geopolitical commonalities. As previously illustrated, the art world's strategy is not defined by government imperative. Yet, the "soft power of framing" may be usefully employed as a term to refer to its capacity to mobilise actors from different spheres around a common vision.

Conclusion

- 50 Rather than interpreting the establishment of regional links as the result of a strategy of soft power suggested by Nye, this paper has focused on the organisational and discursive logic of the art world. While acknowledging the crucial roles played by states and patrons, I argue that the art world's complex organisational structure makes it difficult to control as an instrument for the promotion of international influence. Yet, within the art world the desire of various actors, to gain prestige creates a hierarchy of status. On a global scale, this leads to a hierarchised geography dominated by a small number of art centres responsible for initiating movements and establishing norms. Although this hierarchy is subjectively constructed, it has a tangible impact on the mobility of professionals and the flow of the art market. Therefore, the way in which actors frame this hierarchy is a reflection of the relative rise or decline of a city as an art centre, and concomitantly, this framing plays a performative role in this construction.
- 51 In response to the growth of art markets in countries such as Brazil, China, and the UAE, agents of globalisation, notably the international auction houses, have elaborated new spatial frames emphasising the emergence of new art regions like Latin America, Asia and the Middle East. This has presented an opportunity for cities to be framed as the hubs of these new artistic regions. Dubai and Istanbul, for example, are cities that have both been framed as the most favourable potential entry points for the Middle Eastern art market. Dubai is presented as the more competitive of the two from the perspective of trade largely due to its lower taxation rates, better custom systems, and ties to the Arab emirates. In order to position itself within this market context, art galleries argue that some forms of regional cultural proximity exist. While the adoption of a regional frame is primarily an easy way to internationalise, art galleries have subsequently become key actors in framing the Middle East as an emerging regional art market. At the same time, Istanbul utilises its comparatively older institutional framework to its advantage, including the Istanbul Biennial, which has continued to capably build a worldwide reputation since its creation.
- 52 Framing of Istanbul as an art centre relies on the ability of actors to challenge the hegemony of main centres such as New York and London. Gramsci's cultural hegemony theory appears as a mirror to Nye's soft power theory. Like Nye, Gramsci argued that cultural institutions could be used as an instrument to support a country's influence. However, while the discourse of soft power may be utilised by state actors to frame the actions of the media or art world, as a consequence of their actions actors are conversely able to appropriate the discourse of hegemony in an emancipatory way. Nevertheless, the framing of Istanbul as a regional art center is paradoxical: It relies simultaneously on the mobilisation of an anti-imperialist discourse and on a hierarchical view of the international art world.

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NOTES

1. "Neighbours. Contemporary Narratives from Turkey and Beyond," *Istanbul Modern*, URL: http://www.istanbulmodern.org/en/exhibitions/past-exhibitions/neighbours_1290.html.
2. For example: Galeri Lebriz (1980), Urart Sanat Galerisi (1981), Galeri Nev (1984), Teşvikiye Sanat Galerisi (1985), and Tem Sanat Galerisi (1986).

3. The board of Istanbul Modern, for example, comprises local and national political figures such as Istanbul Mayor, Kadir Topbaş, and AKP Deputy and former Minister of European Affairs, Egemen Bağış.
4. Furthermore, Suzan Sabancı was also later appointed to the board of Dubai-based magazine, *Canvas*, a bi-monthly publication promoting Middle Eastern arts and culture alongside the billionaire Rahmi Koç's former wife, Çiğdem Simavi, also a significant figure in the Istanbul art world
5. Quote by Didem Bağrıaçık, the division head of Akbank's private banking sector, who was present at a cocktail party organised on this occasion, "Press Release," *Contemporary Istanbul*, March 11, 2014, URL: http://contemporaryistanbul.com/files/document/contemporary-istanbul-press-release-march-2014-dubai_23357.docx.
6. Quemin (2006) analysed the origins of artists and other actors listed in rankings. Quemin concluded that the concentration of actors legitimised through the listings in Western Europe and North American revealed a centre-periphery logic. Similarly, Plattner's (1998) analysis of the Saint-Louis art world suggests a comparable centre-periphery logic to the dominance of the New York art world over local artists and curators.
7. Isabelle de la Bruyère director of Christie's Middle East, quoted in Chaudary (April 13, 2012).
8. The creation of *Canvas* magazine in 2004, offers an example of the transnational promotion of art produced across the region.
9. Based on information collected from Sotheby's and Christie's websites in 2014.
10. "At the Crossroads 2: Contemporary Art from Istanbul to Kabul," *Sotheby's Press Release*, 2014. URL: <http://files.shareholder.com/downloads/BID/0x0x721190/d3646413-2cda-4e71-bfac-9034da72c4ee/721190.pdf>.
11. Interview held in Turkish in Istanbul, April 2014.
12. Examples of galleries and art fairs developed in the last decade include: Art Market Budapest (2011), Art Beirut (2011), Art Dubai (2007), and Abu Dhabi Art (2007).
13. Although not all remain in existence, examples include: ARTIST, art Beat, Art Bosphorus, Contemporary Istanbul and Artinternational.
14. In 2011, Art Vienna focused on Turkish artists, in 2012, Contemporary Istanbul focused on emerging art from Central and Eastern Europe.
15. Based on data collected from art fair websites in 2014.
16. The company behind Artinternational is based in London and has been responsible for organising many art fairs globally including, for example, Art Hong Kong, now owned by Art Basel, and the India Art fair, New Delhi. The management team comprises individuals drawn from the UK, Greece, France, and Dubai.
17. Interview held in English in Istanbul, December 4, 2013.
18. Leila Heller is a New York based gallery specialising in the art of the Middle East.
19. Interview held in English in Istanbul, December 12, 2013.
20. "Press Release," *Contemporary Istanbul*, March 11, 2014. URL: http://contemporaryistanbul.com/files/document/press-release-contemporary-istanbul-moca-shanghai-english_5704.docx.
21. Interview held in Turkish in Istanbul, April 2014.
22. Interview held in English in Istanbul, December 2013.
23. Interview held in Turkish in Istanbul, December 12, 2013.
24. For example, Dirimart represents Ghada Amer from Egypt and Shirin Neshat from Iran; Art Sümer represents Basim Magdy from Egypt; Galerist represents Yousef Nabil from Egypt; and Galeri Zilberman represents Walid Siti from Irak.
25. Interview held in English in Istanbul, December 4, 2013.
26. Interview held in English in Istanbul, December 4, 2013.

27. The owner of Galeri Zilberman has established links with the Middle East, for example, by participating in Art Beirut, in Abu Dhabi Art, and by exhibiting artists from the region. The profiles of his artists also mention being featured at multiple exhibitions in the Middle East as well as their presence in Middle Eastern collections.

28. Interview held in English in Istanbul, December 2013.

29. Interview held in Turkish in Istanbul, 12 December 2013.

30. Following historical biennials, such as the Venice Biennial initiated in 1895 and the Sao Paolo Biennial created in 1951, many cities started to develop their own biennial from the 1980s, like Havana in 1984, Dakar in 1992, and Shanghai, in 1996.

31. Kortun enjoys worldwide recognition. He is the only Turkish figure listed in Art Review as one of the 100 most influential people in the international art world. He was appointed curator of the 3rd Istanbul Biennial in 1993. He directed the project founding a private museum by Elgiz in Istanbul and curated the UAE pavilion at the Venice Biennial in 2011.

32. Interview held in English in Istanbul, December 14, 2012.

33. Interview held in English in Istanbul, December 14, 2012.

34. Interview held in English in Istanbul, April 14, 2012.

35. *Ibid.*

36. *Ibid.*

ABSTRACTS

In the last ten years, ties between the art worlds of Istanbul and its surrounding region have been increased. These developments would initially appear to be a component of so-called “Turkish soft power”, indicating the rise of Turkey’s regional influence. Through the analysis of organisational dynamics in the case study of Istanbul, this paper critically questions the representation of the arts sector as an instrument of state or corporate interests. Rather than being dependent on hard factors alone, the geography of the global art market results from the social construction of space. This paper analyses discourses on the Middle East as an emerging art market and on the rise of new cities as regional art centres as the production of cognitive frames. Local art actors have emphasised the cultural proximity of Turkey to the region and the mutually shared interest of challenging Western hegemony in the international art world. Thereby, they have framed Istanbul as an emerging regional art centre.

INDEX

Keywords: Istanbul, Art Market, Art centre, Place-Framing, Middle Eastern art scene

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