

# Location Influencing the Artistic Value

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**Abstract:** This paper stems from an artistic experiment, in which a distinguished violinist received completely different prices for performing in varying locations. This may be due to the difference in the performance locations, and the value of art in the heart of the audience.

**Keywords:** Artistic value; Location; Artistic experiment

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## 1. The Joshua Bell subway experiment

The relationship between location and artistic value to be discussed in this paper reflects thoughts brought forth by an artistic experiment. In a subway station in Washington, D.C. in 2007, violinist Joshua Bell, one of the world's greatest musicians, performed one of the most complex compositions on a \$3.5 million violin. Three minutes later, he received his first dollar from a lady who left money and moved on. Then six minutes passed, a young man stopped and leaned against the wall to enjoy the show, and then left. After ten minutes, a child halted but hurried away by his mother. Out of the estimated 2,000 passengers during the 45-minute performance, only 6 stopped to listen, while 20 tipped and left. Joshua received \$32 in total. Yet two days ago, in a theater in Boston, all tickets for his performance were sold out, which were priced \$200 in average <sup>[1]</sup>.

This is part of a social experiment on perception, taste, and human preferences sponsored by The Washington Post, aiming to engross people in spiritual world and life. The element of location in this experiment is an interesting aspect to be investigated. The experiment indicates that when the performance location varies, there are different artistic values. Therefore, this paper discusses the impact of location on artistic value.

The same artistic event in different locations, such as subway stations and theaters, results in very different outcomes. Experimental result finds the lack of attention to spiritual world accountable for the different outcomes, which needs to be improved. This may be due to two reasons. First and foremost, the public is ignorant of the artistic value of the art event <sup>[2]</sup>. Artistic value covers a relatively broad definition, such as spiritual <sup>[3]</sup> and aesthetic values. The values intentionally indicated in the story are a qualitative concept formed by several sensitive words, such as "great musician," "a violin worth 3.5 million dollars," and "the

most complicated composition in the world.” These words exude the rarity and priceless nature of the art. Yet in subway stations and on the streets, such art events become valueless<sup>[4]</sup>, as few are willing to stop to appreciate them. It seems that art events are worthless in the absence of audience. Spending \$200 for a ticket worth its value for a period of time, which offers necessary conditions for the spiritual enjoyment of the audience in a certain time and space. In contrast, riders in the subway station are passing audiences, since they are there to take transportation to the next location but not to listen to music. Simply put, these subway passengers and fans who spend \$200 vary in their focus and pursuit. The former are basically forced by life issues and have no time to spare for. Between material and spiritual life, people prioritize material life. This leaves no time for spiritual world, to enjoy the inner life, and appreciate the value and significance of beauty.

The relationship between location and value of art events is fundamentally attributed by space separating the audience groups, as they have different recognitions for the value of art<sup>[5]</sup>. Those willing to pay for \$200 are taking on a special trip to appreciate this rare and elegant art. By appreciating and enjoying the beauty of art, their spiritual world and aesthetic quality are improved. They believe the ticket is worth its value because they have a certain aesthetic quality and recognize the artist’s value. As for the public in the subway, they lack aesthetic sensitivity as they are restricted by material conditions. However, they can also appreciate music and have aesthetic qualities. This can be seen in the children in the story, who are instinctive appreciators. In addition, the event broke through inertia thinking. An art event that should have been performed in a theater showing up in a public place is a low-probability event in the public consciousness. The public considers that the performers are playing violin for their livelihood, which is one of the reasons for the results.

From this, a conclusion can be formed, which is location decides the audience. Broad and complex are the concept and understanding of contemporary artistic value<sup>[6]</sup>. To understand the identification of artistic value, the definition of art and relevant theories must first be understood.

## **2. Art and its value in different locations**

Art is the spiritual activity of mankind, it was initially aimed to serve purposes of religion, games, records, narratives, and praises. In the contemporary era, the purposes have changed and are mainly to delight creators, appreciators, and other art subjects through artistic activities or works of art. They are the most direct participants, and are an indispensable and important link for the set-up of artistic activities. It also includes art critics, disseminators, and related art institutions. These layers of related artistic links and factors guide the development of contemporary arts, explore the depth and breadth, and reflect the spiritual life of human beings individually or in groups. Essentially, it is a kind of artistic or emotional resonance between creators and appreciators on a specific occasion and at a specific time. This kind of spiritual resonance is the most essential embodiment of artistic value. It is an artistic experience, a kind of spiritual encouragement and comfort, and a profound experience of artistic senses, which bring inspiration and reflection.

The value of art is reflected in the spiritual resonance, including that between the artist and the artwork, that between the audience and the artwork, and that between the artist and the audience. However, the different environments and locations of art exhibitions differentiate the three types of resonance. The price difference between \$32 and \$200 per capita is a representation of the difference in value recognition, that is, the difference in location makes the three types of resonance unique. The difference in the location of the artwork directly determines the degree of resonance among them, and determines whether the artist and his artistic value are recognized. In the concert hall, it is easy for artists and their works to resonate to a certain extent, because the concert hall creates a focused and quiet atmosphere. In such an environment, it is easier for the audience to fully

devote themselves to the performance. This atmosphere helps the audience to listen to and understand the music better, and also allows them to experience the emotional impact of the music, thus empathizing with the artist and the artwork. The performance presentation in the concert hall also has certain uniqueness. In concert halls, artists often present their works to the audience in a relatively private way, which allows the audience to have a deeper understanding of the artists' emotional expression and artistic pursuit. At the same time, the audience can better understand the connotation and artistic value of the artwork.

Moreover, the audience in a concert hall often has developed a certain musical literacy and attended aesthetic education. A more in-depth understanding and cognition of music enable them to better understand artists' performances and works through their own music knowledge and experience. At the same time, they will also appreciate and evaluate the performances of artists from a more professional perspective, so that they can better resonate with the artists and their works.

By comparison, when the art performance is in a public place such as a subway station where people mainly travel on a daily basis, the dense crowds and noisy environment reduce people's resonance with the artwork and the artist. Therefore, in a general and noisy environment, musicians cannot devote themselves to the performance, and people who are in a hurry cannot concentrate on listening to and understanding the music. This makes it even more difficult for people to resonate with the artists and works.

Audiences at subway stations often do not have professional music literacy and have not attended aesthetic education. They may not have professional music training and education, thus they may pay more attention to the art form than the connotation. Even if an artist presents a great performance in a subway station, they may not be able to understand and appreciate the performance, making it harder for them to empathize with the artist and the work. The artist may resonate with his own works, but it is difficult for the public to have a spiritual resonance with the artworks and the artist in a busy environment, even if they have corresponding aesthetic education.

Concert halls and subway stations are two distinct locations, and their effects on artists and audiences also differ significantly. In a concert hall, the degree of resonance between the artist and the audience is often higher, which makes the concert hall an important performance venue. Although people have less spiritual resonance with the artworks and artists in a public place such as subway stations, this does not mean that this form of artistic performance has no value. On the contrary, this form of performance can provide opportunities for more people to understand art. By performing in public places, artists can increase the public's artistic literacy and understanding by making music and other art forms accessible to more people.

The selling price is affected by various factors such as market supply and demand, artist popularity, and rarity of artworks. It often becomes an important indicator for many to judge its value.

In discussing the value and standards of art, the existence of the art market <sup>[7]</sup> and its impact on the value and recognition of art cannot be ignored. For the public, the art prices are more important than the market economy, and art standards and value <sup>[8]</sup>, as the prices are visible and can directly grab the public's attention. For example, artworks auctioned by various auction houses range from tens of millions to hundreds of millions. People are often attracted by their bidding prices, but they rarely spend time to inspect the artworks in person, let alone understanding the cultural value accumulated by history and time. Currently, it is difficult to determine the true value of art <sup>[9]</sup>, because the value system of some works has not been developed. In the current era, the value or price of artworks is determined by the market. His violin has become an unattainable and superior art, as separated by the art market. In other words, under the influence of the art market, people will naturally think that only music in concert halls has high quality. His performance in the concert hall has been widely recognized and appreciated. This is not so much the value of the art itself, but rather the influence and

advantages of the concert hall as a performance venue. It creates a focused and quiet atmosphere, allowing the audience to immerse in the music performance better, thereby feeling the connotation and value of art. These audiences often have a certain musical literacy and aesthetic education background, and can better understand and appreciate the performances and works of artists through their own music knowledge and experience.

Despite the demonstration of his talent and skills in the subway station, the audiences' reaction and acceptance were quite different. This is mainly due to the characteristics of subway stations as a performance venue, where people often commute and travel. In addition, the environment of the subway station is relatively general and noisy, and it is difficult for the artist to create the focused atmosphere and good sound effects in a concert hall. Therefore, people seldom think that the music played in the subway station is art, or worthy of respect, attention, and appreciation. They pay more attention to the form of the music rather than the connotation. The subway station hinders the public's imagination of art. They believe that art performed on the streets is only for basic entertainment, and not professional performance by an artist. Plus, their busy schedule also prevents them to stop and appreciate the performance.

However, the value of art lies not only in its price and market response, but also in its cultural connotation and social significance. The way we perceive and evaluate art also affect the value of art. Art is not only a market commodity, but also an important part of human civilization and spiritual life. Art should be understood and appreciated from a deeper perspective, and not only by judging its value from the price and market response. Meanwhile, art performances should be respected in different places, either a concert hall or a subway station, they provide people with opportunities to know and appreciate art.

### **3. Location influencing the artistic value**

The discussion about location influencing the value of art has already existed in Duchamp's era. His most famous artwork is a modern industrial product, which is a urinal that broke through people's inertia thinking. It was named Fountain<sup>[10]</sup>, and Duchamp's name was signed on it.

Similar discussion happened with Andy Warhol's Brillo Box<sup>[11]</sup>, a soap box. The controversy and evaluation it raised as a work of art have a lot to do with the physical place in which it is located. This is an art discussion caused by the change of the physical place position. The artistic value Fountain and Brillo Box is that when they are exhibited in the museum, they are regarded as an innovative and anti-traditional artwork, because it challenges the definition of traditional artwork and the aesthetic expectations of the audience. However, if this urinal appears in public restrooms, then it is just an ordinary sanitary device without causing any artistic attention and controversy.

In Danto's theory, the decisive role of location in the value of artworks is the contextual and cultural context<sup>[12]</sup>. Although Duchamp's Fountain and Warhol's Brillo Box are common objects in daily life, they are endowed with different meanings and values in different locations and environments<sup>[13]</sup>. This difference is mainly due to the audience's understanding and expectation of art, as well as the social and cultural connotation.

These are two works that broke through the traditional way of thinking about artistic creation and brought infinite inspiration to subsequent artistic creation. Duchamp's creative thinking creates a new form of art and perspective, and provides new possibilities, and this new art style has influenced modern and contemporary art games. Contemporary art games require public participation and social comments. It is no longer just an artistic process completed by the author and appreciated once by the audience. It involves audience's participation and evaluation in the work. Only such artwork can be considered relatively complete, requiring time for it to be interpreted. If Duchamp's Fountain and Warhol's Brillo Box only appear in the form of urinals and soap boxes

without the various definitions given by the society, then they may become people's gossip material. However, society has affirmed this new style as the representative of modern art style, otherwise it will be outdated. Therefore, due to the guidance of social propaganda, the evaluation of artwork is uncertain, thus forming artwork that has different values for different audiences, that is a problem of value identification or spiritual resonance.

In short, art is an essential spiritual medicine that preserves its own spiritual value. The artistic value in the audience's heart will play a role in the integrity of artistic events. Therefore, the issue of artistic value influenced by location is worth thinking about.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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