

# Diversification and Status Signals in the Art World and the Art Markets: A Case of the Fine Art Photography Galleries of New York

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*Recent studies of the art markets and the art world show the importance of genres, status and identity of organizations such that these can be conceptualized in organizational studies as the issue of niches and status. Organizational studies, however, have not examined cultural organizations like art galleries despite the relevance of niches, status and identity of such organizations. In this study, I focus on fine art photography in New York's fine art galleries to examine how diversification of genres (e.g., photography, painting or sculpture) as the status and niches of these galleries interact with each other in the context of collective mobility of the photography genres. The resource-partitioning theory demonstrates that the degree of market concentration differently affects the survival chance of generalists and specialists. The status-based theory adds that a high-status organization would be constrained to enter low-status market domains to avoid lowering its status. Combining both theories, status and niche width would influence organizations' survival and consequent distribution of organizations across niches. In this analysis, I show that there is a higher degree of cross-pollination of photography with specific genres such as paintings or sculptures than with other genres, and I discuss several factors on cross-pollination. They collectively enhance the status of fine art photography within the contemporary art world, the interests of collectors from other contemporary art genres, the multi-medium orientation of contemporary artists, and the rise of photography art auctions and art fairs is a new type of markets for photography. At the organizational level, a gallery's status as measured by critical attention of key critics has a U-shaped correlation with its niche width or genre diversification. Based on such correlation, I propose a "status spill-over" as opposed to "status leak" argument, in which high-status organizations selectively enter a low-status niche in the process of collective upward mobility of such niche.*

**Keywords:** Art Market, Photography, New York, Status, Genre, Diversification

## “Anything but Photo”: Genre Diversification, Identities, and Status

In 2006, the *New York Times* published an article titled, “Anything but Photo” (Gefter, 2006). The article claims that there is a new trend in the New York art galleries in which photography galleries represent non-photographic genres and artists, whereas contemporary galleries increasingly show photographic works. For example, an increasing number of traditional photography galleries exhibit paintings, sculptures, media arts and works on paper. They also show non-photographic works of the photographers they represent. Some galleries started representing artists who do not produce photographic works at all. Also, leading contemporary galleries such as Matthew Marks Gallery or Gagosian Gallery have been exhibiting photographic works and representing photographers. In other words, the distinction between photography and more traditional art galleries has eroded.

Sociological approaches on the arts have focused on the art world as social, political, and cultural domains in which social relationships between key actors and their institutional environments shape artistic innovation, its diffusion and the performance of artists in the art world and the art markets (Alexander, 2003; Anheier, Gerhards, and Romo, 1995; Becker, 1982; Bourdieu, 1992, 1993; DiMaggio, 1982; DiMaggio and Stenberg, 1985; Moulin, 1987; Simpson, 1981; White and White 1965; White, 1993). Such studies suggest that genres and media are categories and boundaries that are crucial in terms of identities and boundaries in both the art world and the art markets (Crane, 1987). Lasting innovations in the arts often take a form of creating a new genre or medium. Contemporary arts have shown works that defy a traditional boundary between different art genres. Genres are still an important basis for boundaries in the art world, however, because they are not only aesthetic formats, but can be the basis for status hierarchy. Thus, a high degree of cross-pollination between photography and other genres deserves sociological attention on its causes and effects on artists and other art world participants.

Fine art photography offers an interesting case for a number of reasons. First, the history of photography as a genre of fine arts is relatively short and its status within the art world relatively low.<sup>1</sup> The well-known description of photography as “a middle-brow art” by Bourdieu (1990) summarizes how photography, with its journalistic origin and contemporary commercial works,

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<sup>1</sup> For a general history of fine art photography, see Lenman (2005), Newhall (1982) and Warren (2006).

has been occupying a low-status position in the art world. In his historical study of contemporary jazz, Lopes (2002) demonstrates that artists, music critics and the music industry cooperated and fought against one another to upgrade the status of jazz against the backdrop of a high culture of European-based classical music. He shows that the evolution of modern jazz is the process of cultural legitimation, which was driven by cross-pollination between jazz and other genres of music with higher status. The history of fine art photography demonstrates numerous struggles of photographers and galleries to legitimize the medium as a legitimate art genre. How did photography and other galleries diversify into each other's genres during which the status of photography has risen in both the art world and the art markets?

Second, despite its relatively short history, photography as one of the contemporary art genres has been leading the recent surge in diverse types of art markets such as galleries, auctions and art fairs.<sup>2</sup> Such collective surge of photography has occurred relatively recently, and it offers a rare opportunity in which we can examine how collective changes of an art genre in terms of status hierarchy interact with changes in the strategies of key actors and art galleries, particularly in genre diversification.

In organizational terms, entering other art genres can be conceptualized as a market strategy of diversifying gallery organizations across niches. The issue of diversification is critical in organizational studies (ecological approach or resource dependence theory) and economic sociology on markets. At the same, genres and identities are important topics in sociology of arts. Diversification of fine art photography galleries in New York provides a chance in which economic sociology and sociology of arts interact to answer questions on the relationship between status, identity, diversification of galleries and collective evolution of photography as an art genre. By examining such issues, we would be able to understand how macro-level changes in the art world and the art markets interact with micro-level changes in art galleries and their artists.

New York art galleries are chosen as the present topic. The trend of cross-pollination among galleries based on different art genres is not just a phenomenon in New York, but it is more visible in New York as both the global and American centers of photography and contemporary arts in general. In addition to London, Paris and Berlin, New York has become a leading center of contemporary fine art photography since Alfred Stieglitz and his associates. Also, its photography galleries and organizations (e.g., the Association of

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<sup>2</sup> For empirical studies on art markets, see Caves (2000), Frey and Pommerehne (1989), Galenson (1999, 2001), Moulin (1987) and Velthuis (2005).

International Photography Dealers), numerous art fairs with strong photographic contents (e.g., Armory Show) and leading auction houses (e.g., Sotheby's, Christie's, Philips and Swan) make New York an ideal site for this topic. Thus, by focusing on New York photography galleries, I would be able to examine the global impact of photography genre diversification. Also, previous studies on the New York art world (Crane, 1987; Simpson, 1981) provide a rich background on how the New York art world and its socio-economic and political environments evolve together.

Theoretically, I seek to combine the resource-partitioning theory and a status-based competition theory to explain how niche width and status interact with each other in cultural markets and cultural organizations. I also attempt to expand on previous theories of organizational status and market diversification by examining how the strategies of cultural organizations on their niches based on their organizational status dynamically interact with collective change of genre status within the art world. Finally, I sought to expand a previous status-based competition theory by showing that an organizational status does not always constrain high-status organizations to avoid associating with lower status organizations and niches, but can allow them to enter a lower status niche, thus expanding their market niche in a rising market segment. Thus, this paper seeks to improve both status-based and niche-based models of the art markets by demonstrating that organizational decisions on diversification not only interact with its organizational status and niche distribution of other organizations statically but also with the dynamically changing status of surrounding market niches.

More specifically, I raise the following questions. First, what is the distribution of genres among galleries that include photography? What is the pattern of genre diversification? Second, what factors affect a gallery's decision to enter other genres? In particular, what is the relationship between a gallery's status and its niche width? If photography as a genre receives a lower status than other traditional genres such as paintings, how does gallery status interact with genre status? Would high-status galleries in such traditional genres avoid photography to avoid lowering their status by association ("status leak" argument), or would they lead the entries to exploit new market opportunities, using their high status as a buffer against potential risks of degrading status ("status spill-over" argument)?

## Diversification and Status in the Art World

An ecological approach has dominated the discussion on diversification of organizations (Carroll and Hannan, 2000; McPherson, 1983; Podolny, 2005). The approach examines how organizations choose their niche width for key resources and how consequent fitting between niche width and resource environments shape the chance of organizational survival. The resource-partitioning theory extends this argument by claiming that the degree of market competition differently affects the survival of organizations with wide and narrow niche width. Generalist and specialist organizations are defined in terms of their relative niche width. A generalist organization enters a wide range of niches, whereas a specialist organization concentrates on one niche or a small number of niches. Examples of generalist organizations include automobile companies providing passenger cars, SUVs and hybrid cars, wine companies with different types of wine across various price range and restaurants with different styles of cuisine. Examples of specialist organizations are automobile manufacturers offering only antique cars, wine companies with only one type of wine, and restaurants with a single style of cuisine. The ecological concept of niches and diversification can be applied to cultural organizations and markets. In the case of art galleries and art markets, I define diversification of art galleries as the extent to which an art gallery enters different genres such as photography, paintings, sculptures and media arts.

Key findings in the resource-partitioning theory demonstrate that, specialist organizations are more likely to survive based on the niches left by the death of generalist organizations due to increasing competition among them as the degree of market concentration increases. Podolny (2005) extends an ecological theory of the markets by adding a dimension of status-based competition. Status positions of market participants are important in market competition because the participants are more likely to rely on status and reputation of their counterparts to reduce risks from uncertainties as uncertainty in terms of the quality of market participants and their products increases. Thus, organizations with higher status are more likely to survive than those with lower status. If status influences the survival chance of organizations, status positions of organizations would affect the outcome of market competition. More importantly, Podolny argues that an organization with high status seeks to avoid lowering its status by entering a niche with low status or associating with organizations with low status (i.e., “status-leak” argument).

Such status-based competition suggests a new way of understanding the

interaction between status and niche width in market competition. The resource-partitioning theory claims that generalist organizations would move into niches of other generalists with high or low status as market concentration increases. Because such expansion would not occupy the niches of other generalists completely, it would decrease the mortality rate of specialists that target the resource spaces left by dominant generalists. Podolny's status-leak argument adds a status factor on the effect of market concentration on organizational survival. The resource-partitioning theory argues that, as market competition increases, generalist organizations would expand their niches into those of other generalists. However, the status-leak argument claims that, since status affects organizational survival and entering organizational niches with low status would decrease the status of their occupants, generalist organizations with high status would not enter the niche of a low-status organization. Therefore, as market concentration increases, generalist organizations would move horizontally into niches of other generalists, but not vertically (i.e., the niches of generalist organizations with lower status). Consequently, market concentration would decrease the mortality rate of lower status generalists and specialists. The status-leak argument shows that status and niche width affect organizational survival and niche distribution in a market of uncertain products.

Such niche- and status-based models of market competition demonstrate that status and niche width would have either a positive or a negative correlation, depending on the type of markets. In the case of investment banking industry or professional services such as accounting or law, status and niche width are positively correlated: organizations with higher status are likely to have a wider niche width or be a generalist. In the case of the brewing, fashion, publishing and automobile industries, on the other hand, there is a negative correlation: an organization with a higher status is likely to have a narrower niche width or be a specialist.

How do such different types of relationships between status and niche width come about? The key contribution of this paper aims to understand such processes by focusing on the genre diversification decision of art galleries and consequent genre (or niche) distribution in fine art photography, which has experienced an upward mobility of its status as a genre. Extending the status-based competition theory, in a market with a positive correlation between status and niche width, high-status generalist organizations would expand horizontally, but not into a niche with lower status. In a market with a negative correlation between status and niche width, on the other hand, high-status specialist organizations would not expand its niche width, but rather

concentrate on its specialties. The processes of diversification are crucial in demonstrating how a particular type of relationship between status and niche width has evolved in a market.

Fine art galleries provide an ideal type of organization by which we can examine how niche width and status interact with each other. The genres of art galleries such as photography, paintings or sculptures provide a measure of the niches of such organizations. During the interviews with gallery owners and directors, it was repeatedly mentioned that they make a decision to select genres as a critically aesthetic business decision. Several things were often mentioned during interviews with gallery personnel: expertise as well as financial and spatial resources. Galleries do not, and cannot, enter any genre that suggests a good business prospect, because they have to be able to evaluate artists and their works as well as present a clear aesthetic vision and identity to potential clients. An interview with the owner of a top photography gallery in Midtown reveals a typical response: "I cannot just show any types of works because I have to know them and love them (New York Midtown gallery interview, 2007)."<sup>3</sup> She mentioned that gallery owners' background affects the genre decision by providing aesthetic expertise. Also, gallery owners stated that different genres require different resources such as financial resources or the size of a gallery space. For example, large paintings, installation works or sculptures require a substantially large display space than photography. In short, aesthetic expertise and other types of resources constrain art galleries in choosing the nature and number of genres to participate. Thus, I define the genres of art galleries as their niches in the art markets.

In markets such as the fine art markets in which the quality of products and producers are highly uncertain, status is critical as a signal of quality. Another important dimension of the art markets is the identity of actors such as galleries or artists. Combining status, identity and niche width, art markets show how those three dimensions influence performance and survival of market actors. An interview (New York interview, 2007) with a fine art photography gallery owner in Chelsea reveals how closely linked such factors are. According to this interview, a well-known photography gallery in San Francisco moved to New York, and in this new location, the owner decided to broaden its art works into other contemporary art genres such as paintings, sculptures and media arts. The result, however, was disastrous. All major collectors of the gallery started to leave the gallery and, consequently, the gallery

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<sup>3</sup> Due to the importance of anonymity for the galleries, I did not provide a name of the galleries I interviewed.

closed down after a year. The key reason for collectors leaving the gallery was that they considered the gallery's decision to include non-photographic genres and artists as a sign of decreased commitment to fine art photography. When the quality of art works is highly uncertain, the collectors would look at a robust identity based on commitment to a specific field as sign of the quality of galleries and that of the artists and art works these galleries represent. Such episode demonstrates that the buyers in fine art markets are earnest about the identity and status of galleries, which makes diversification into other genres a great risk for galleries. The decision to enter new genres as well as new artists can critically affect market performance of galleries.

## Data and Method

The focus of this paper is fine art photography in the commercial art galleries of New York. Because of the importance in finding a comprehensive list of such galleries to examine their organizational ecology, I relied on several sources to construct a list of the galleries and their attributes. The main data source is an art magazine, *Art in America*, one of the leading art magazines that cover new trends and critical reviews of diverse genres of artists and their works. A key advantage of the magazine is that it has provided one of the most comprehensive annual lists of art galleries in the U.S. since 2000. Giuffre (1999) uses *Art in America* as a main source for analyzing artist-gallery networks. The list is organized according to major cities and states, including Metropolitan New York, and its surrounding counties. The list also provides detailed information on the location, curators, genres, represented artists and type of organizations (galleries, museums, university galleries, non-profit exhibition space, corporate consultants, private dealers and print dealers). Because I am interested in diversification of art galleries focusing on fine art photography, I selected all galleries that indicate photography as their genre in the Metropolitan New York areas including Queens and Brooklyn, the two key gallery areas in recent periods from year 2000 to 2006. The idea is to examine the nature of diversification of galleries surrounding fine art photography when fine art photography has gone through recent changes within the contemporary art world. I could have examined the actual exhibitions of galleries and categorize their genres, but such a method is problematic because the mixed nature of contemporary arts makes it very hard to categorize genres of galleries based on individual works they exhibit. Hence, I relied on the self-reported genres of the galleries in *Art in America* due to my interest in the conscious decision of a

gallery's declaring its genres as part of its organizational identity.

To overcome a potential coverage problem, I also examined a bi-monthly photography exhibition guide, *Photography*. It offers a listing of photography-based galleries and their exhibitions in major U.S. cities but with a strong focus on the metropolitan New York area. Without exception, all the photography shows in New York-based galleries are listed in the guide. Since the guide is a bi-monthly publication, it updates information on the exhibitions of the galleries and also publishes several articles on notable shows or trends. All the photography galleries provide this guide for visitors, and they use this guide as a reference to find out about the shows of other galleries. *Art in America* and *Photography* together provide a relatively complete list of all the New York-based galleries that include photography during the research period.

Other sources of data on galleries are the websites of selected galleries. There are a number of online directories on the New York photography galleries such as the "Association of International Photography Art Dealers" website and their membership directory (The Association of the International Photography Art Dealers, 2000-2006), a key organization started by major New York photography galleries. Other online sources include a local web directory such as "Chelsea Art Directory." With a recent surge in art auctions, online databases such as "Art Price.com" or "Artnet" provide information on major galleries in the global photography markets. Based on such data sources, I coded the locations, curators or directors, genres, artists, exhibitions and key themes as chosen by galleries to represent their focus.

Based on *Art in America*, I examined different genres of galleries. Since the description of genres sometimes use different terms for the same genre, I analyzed all the genres mentioned in the data and consulted with art experts on art genres. Consequently, I constructed a list of 15 genres: photography, paintings, media arts, installations, works on paper, books, prints, sculptures, drawings, ceramics, collages, film, glass, furniture and illustrations. Thus, I analyzed the diversification and niche width of the art galleries in terms of distribution of each gallery per its participation across these 15 genres.

Two additional online and offline sources on the attributes of galleries are "The Corporation and Business Entity Database" and the *New York Times*. "The Corporation and Business Entity Database" provides information on the founders, founding year, and locations of organizations including galleries. When other sources do not include the founding year of galleries, I rely on this database. In addition to organizational characteristics and the genres of galleries, a key variable for this study is the status of the galleries. However, measuring organizational status is difficult for any type of organizations. In the previous

studies on organizational status, status is typically often measured by a survey of experts in related fields (Laumann and Knoke, 1987).

Podolny (2005) measures the status of investment banks according to the order of appearance in the tombstone advertisements for security offerings. For art galleries, the sales ranking could be a potential indication of status. However, it is not possible to collect sales data of these galleries. Galleries seek to keep prices and sales figures invisible to clients and other galleries, because they often use different pricing for different types of clients, and publicizing sales figure would constrain pricing changes in the future (Velthuis, 2005). As an alternative to status, Giuffre (1999) measures the prestige of the artists in relation to receipt of the National Endowment of Arts Awards. However, there are no official awards given to commercial art galleries. Due to such difficulties, I asked the gallery owners, artists and art auction specialists on an appropriate method of measuring the organizational status of galleries during my interviews of the New York galleries in 2006 and 2007. What they commonly mentioned was the reviews of their shows by the *New York Times* art section. They stated that every gallery pays keen attention to which shows and which galleries are reviewed, particularly in an exclusive or dedicated review format. They also mentioned that it is extremely hard to get a review, particularly an exclusive review. One of the gallery owners stated that the coverage of exhibitions brings a substantially higher chance of selling art works. The art reviews are, however, not only important for potential sales, but also for social recognition and status. The majority of gallery owners expressed that they do not and would not have personal and social relationship with other galleries. They rarely visit each other's galleries. Some gallery owners suggested lack of time for such absence of social interaction, but it was mainly the competition for artists, if not for clients, that drove them apart. Thus, the art reviews provide a key way by which the galleries find out about what and how other galleries are doing. Although favorable reviews would provide more status to the gallery, it is important that the show is reviewed at all. The importance of the *New York Times* reviews for galleries is indicated by the fact that most galleries put all the *New York Times* reviews of their shows on their websites.

The gallery owners also claimed that the status of the artists they represent signals the status of galleries. However, it is difficult to collect data for direct comparison on each gallery's artists and their aesthetic performance. I argue that the art reviews of the *New York Times* would reflect the status of artists representing the galleries, because the reviewers would consider such factors when they select a show for review.

Based on such factors, I examined gallery reviews in the *New York Times*

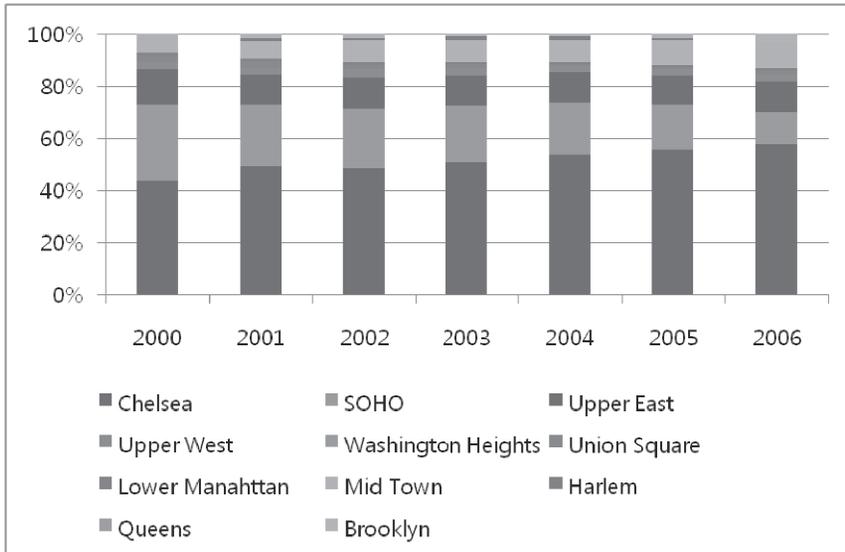
from 1981 to 2006. The *New York Times* provides a searchable database of all the articles going back to 1981, and I coded the data from 1981. Fine art photography market has experienced a major change since the early 1980s, and thus, I analyzed status positions of individual galleries and their changes as of 1981 for 25 years to provide sufficient data.

The *New York Times* coverage of galleries has different levels, or formats. Accordingly, I classified all the articles into three types: first, there are exclusive reviews of current exhibitions of individual galleries; second, there are reviews of a new trend, which includes individual galleries and their particular exhibitions; finally, there is a simple listing in which only the titles and dates of exhibitions are included. Initially, I coded the number of each type of coverage separately. The interviews, however, demonstrate that galleries pay attention to the first kind of coverage as professional and aesthetic recognition of galleries by art critics. Also, a simple list of the shows, the third type, does not demonstrate an aesthetic merit of galleries or their shows. Thus, I coded the first two types of reviews for analysis. I coded the first type (exclusive reviews of a particular exhibition) as “top reviews” and the second type (reviews that mention a particular exhibition as an example of a trend or style) as “simple reviews,” thus distinguishing the level of status each type confers on galleries. In short, I coded organizational attributes and genres of galleries between 2000 and 2006, and I also coded the *New York Times* reviews of galleries between 1981 and 2006 in this paper.

Finally, I carried out interviews of 18 representative galleries in Soho, Chelsea, Uptown and other areas of New York in 2006, 2007 and 2008. In each period, I interviewed art critics as well as gallery owners and their staff, artists and photography specialists at Sotheby's. I performed the interviews in 4 to 6 weeks each year. I interviewed the same galleries several times in the first year and went back to the same galleries in the following years. A single interview usually lasted between 1 to 2 hours. Additionally, I went to Paris Photo in 2007 for additional interviews of New York and European galleries. I recorded all the interviews for subsequent analysis.

## Fine Art Photography Galleries of New York

During the years between 2000 and 2006, I found 201 New York art galleries that announced their genres, including photography. I examined galleries that indicated photography as their genre at least once throughout the period, because I sought to explain how photography as a genre has interacted



**Figure 1.** Regional Distribution of Galleries in 2000-2006.

and evolved with other genres through galleries' strategic decision on the part of galleries to genre diversify. However, after additional data collection, 25 galleries turned out to be either private dealers or non-profit organizations. Also, with the problem of missing data on additional variables, 170 galleries were included for the whole data-set while 122 were for year 2006.

The following graph shows the geographical distribution of the galleries across the period. This figure shows that the galleries dealing with photography, like those with other media, are concentrated in four regions: Chelsea, Soho, Upper East Side and Midtown (i.e., the area around 57<sup>th</sup> Street).

Based on such distribution, the New York photography galleries are located in areas that lead New York's fine art world in the traditional sense. Areas that have been quickly rising for galleries and resident artists are still lagging behind for photography. It was mentioned during an interview of the editor of the *Photography*, the above-mentioned bi-monthly magazine covering photography galleries, started from the East Village and then subsequently moved to Soho, Chelsea and Midtown. As in other galleries for contemporary arts, those art galleries that deal exclusively with photography or those that include photography as part of their genres have experienced a typical regional migration pattern of recent movement to such regions as Dumbo or Williamsburg.

Chelsea, Soho and Midtown as key areas are distinguished in terms of their

style and focus within fine art photography. Starting with Chelsea, the galleries in the region can be classified into two types. First, there are mainstream contemporary art galleries that include photography or photography-based works. Galleries such as Friedrich Petzel or Marian Goodman Gallery represent such a group, which receive critical attention in more mainstream genres that increasingly include photography more as contemporary art and not as a separate genre. These galleries are not identified as “photography” galleries, but as contemporary art galleries. Their gallery spaces tend to be bigger than those of other galleries in other regions to accommodate the exhibition of relatively big size art works. Within fine art photography, the focus is on color, size and photography-based works, not photography. Vintage black-and-white photography from early or mid-19<sup>th</sup> century or “straight” and documentary works are exhibited, but “staged” photographs based on the conceptualization of artists are more likely to be exhibited.

Other types of Chelsea galleries are relatively young and more photography-based galleries such as Yossi Milo or Clampart Gallery. These galleries are mostly established after the 1990s, and they started as a photography gallery and expanded their genres to paintings, sculptures and media arts. The typical owners of these galleries do not have a photography-based career in its narrow sense (e.g., graduates of a photography department or job experience in photography galleries). Their educational and career backgrounds before opening their galleries are likely to be in art history and contemporary art galleries. During an interview of an owner of a Chelsea gallery (2006), he corrected my description of his gallery as a “photography gallery” to that of a “contemporary art gallery.” He stated that he happens to deal with photography-based works, but he plans to include more mainstream genres of contemporary art. Like their counterparts in Chelsea, the types of works these galleries exhibit share diverse genres beyond photography. However, they are more likely to represent photographers, and their works tend to be on a smaller scale.

The Chelsea galleries as a center of the number of galleries and critical attention from mainstream art critics reveal key development in the New York photography art world: contemporary art galleries include more photography or photography-based works, and photography galleries venture into more mainstream genres. Thus, the Chelsea region, which identifies with photography galleries, has been drawn and redrawn through the types of artistic vision, represented artists and their works between the two camps of art galleries. It is, however, not accurate to describe the relationship between the two types of Chelsea galleries as a collision or battle in terms of the identity of

fine art photography. Rather, it is a variation of a common identity of photography as contemporary art. One of the leading galleries of the second type recently moved to a new location with bigger space in Chelsea. The owner explained that he needed a big space to accommodate increasingly big photographs and non-photographic works by his artists. He also stated that the driving force behind such changes comes from young contemporary artists who took different media for granted. He mentioned that he would lose his artists unless he provided a proper space and identity to his key artists.

The region that directly competes with the Chelsea galleries is not Soho but the Midtown. The Soho region is the starting place for many leading Chelsea galleries, but it has not experienced the founding of new photography galleries. Consequently, Soho's share of New York photography galleries has been declining, which is reflected in its small number of fine art photography galleries. The Midtown galleries show the clearest alternative to the Chelsea galleries. These galleries are one of the oldest photography galleries, going back to early 1980s and even to 1954. Galleries such as Zabriskie, Howard Greenberg, Bonni Benrubi and Pace McGill are more likely to concentrate on photography, often black-and-white, vintage, documentary-style and straight photography, although some of these galleries do show other media. The types of artists we are likely to see here include Henri Cartier-Bresson, Paul Strand and Berenice Abbott. Contemporary photographers such as Salgado are often street or documentary types. A leading Midtown gallery owner said that her gallery was first and foremost a photography gallery. She stated that she would not go beyond a photography medium for lack of interest or lack of expertise in such fields. In other words, these galleries strongly identify themselves more as a photography gallery, and they gear towards more "traditional" photographic works.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to recognize that one of the critical decisions these galleries have to make includes their location. Although the list of the regions mostly includes photography as part of their portfolios, there are different styles or sub-genres of photography, particularly among the key regions. All of the gallery owners stated that they did everything to find the "right" location for their galleries. One of the recently opened galleries in Midtown said that he looked at the list of the galleries in the building, considering the main style of photography and artists and the type of visitors they would get. Consequently,

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<sup>4</sup> Such a description of different regions is an ideal type for comparison in the Weberian sense. For example, only a very small number of galleries in Midtown stay with vintage black-and-white photographs. Increasingly, a larger number of the galleries represents contemporary photographers that show bigger, color staged works and often in non-photographic media.

**Table 1.** Basic Characteristics of Galleries

	Average	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Founding Year (at Year 2006)	1990	14.63	1898	2006
Age (at Year 2006)	14.29	14.37	0	106
Annual Number of Genres	2.78	1.51	1	8
Annual Number of Top Reviews	.54	.82	0	3.43
Annual Number of Simple Reviews	.01	.05	0	.40

each region represents variation in the style of photography, and, at the same time, each gallery seeks to distinguish itself from the other galleries within the same region among photography galleries, contributing a within-region variation.

The following show a more general comparison among the regions.

The galleries interviewed in 2006 were founded in 1990 on average, although the distribution is skewed to the left. The average number of years these galleries have been in business is 14 years, although it is also skewed to the left. These two averages suggest that the galleries are relatively young, reflecting the recent surge of fine art photography as an art genre and as a segment of the contemporary art market.

In terms of the number of genres, the annual average number of genres is 2.78 out of 15 genres. Throughout the period of this study, 48 galleries participated only in one genre. Most galleries would not go beyond a small number of genres, although a small number of galleries participated in 8 genres. Based on the average annual numbers, top and simple reviews in the *New York Times* art section are .54 and .01, respectively. The number of both top and simple reviews demonstrates the difficulties of such reviews, considering the fact that most New York galleries have around 10 annual exhibitions.

## Genre Diversification

The average number of genres in Table 1 is 2.78 out of 15 genres as an indicator of a simple measure of diversification, suggesting that most galleries do not specialize in a single genre. For example, only 17 out of all galleries that declared their genres between 2000 and 2006 participated only in photography.

If we consider the total number of genres as a measure of diversification, the following graph shows that there is no noticeable regional difference in the

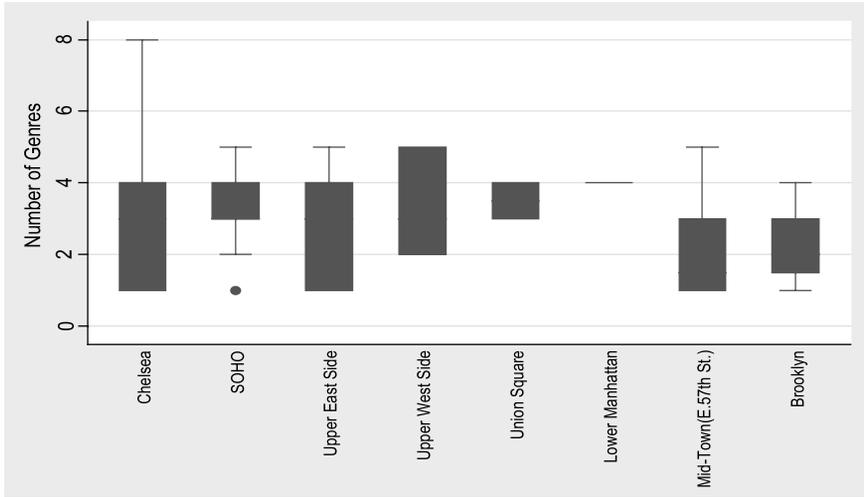


Figure 2. The Number of Genres a Across Regions in 2006.

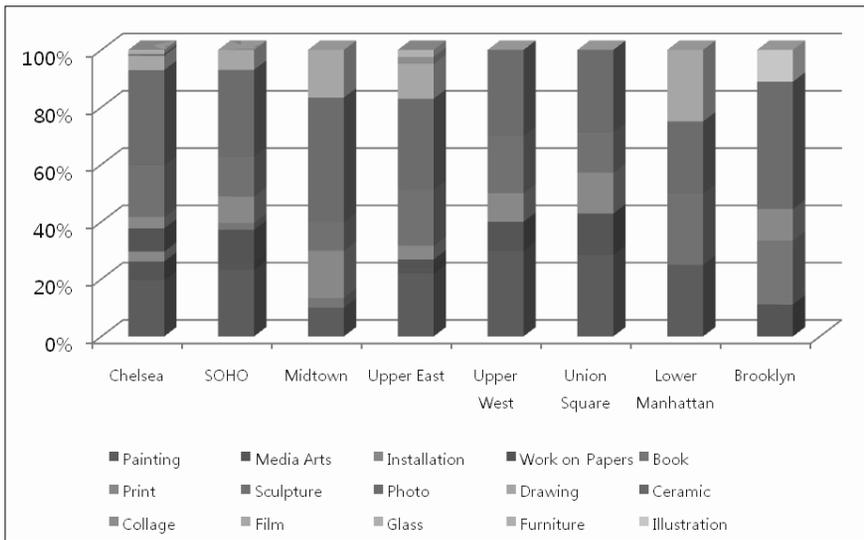


Figure 3. Genre Distribution Across Regions in 2006.

average degree of diversification except in Lower Manhattan and Harlem, reflecting a small number of galleries in the two regions.

On average, the galleries in each region participate in 2.84 genres. What is regionally different is the variance. Although such variance reflects the total number of galleries across the regions, the top three regions of Chelsea, Soho

and Uptown show a higher level of within-region variance in diversification. What comprises such diversification?

Above graph shows several things. Except photography, the top three genres represented by the New York galleries are paintings, sculptures and printing. In terms of the total number of galleries, Chelsea, Soho, Upper East Side and Midtown are the areas that are dominated by art galleries. It is also important to recognize regional variations in terms of relative focus on genres. For example, photography, paintings, sculptures, media arts and installation are heavily concentrated in Chelsea as the center of contemporary arts. Among other major genres, paper, printing and drawing are more distributed throughout Chelsea, Soho and Midtown. If we examine genre distribution in each region, Chelsea stands out with its strong focus on photography. Soho is another region strongly representing photography, but it has a more even representation of paintings, sculptures, paper and printing. Midtown is another region that has a clear focus on photography. From these observations, photography has evolved with paintings and sculptures as part of contemporary art. The fact that all major regions in New York have a strong focus on photography draws a picture of the rise of photography in the status hierarchy of the New York art world. During the interviews, it was repeatedly mentioned that the debate on whether photography is a fine art finally ended when

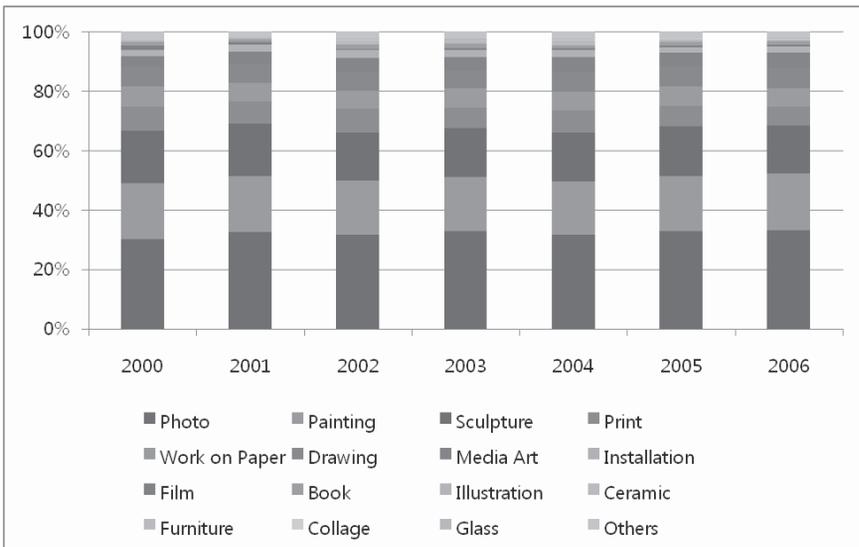


Figure 4. Relative Composition of Genres.

photography established its status as a legitimate genre of contemporary arts. However, the kinds of photography those galleries support may vary across galleries in different regions, as mentioned above. Thus, enhancing the collective status of photography has facilitated internal fragmentation in terms of a collective identity of fine art photography and its market.

What is the longitudinal dimension of genre development in the New York art world? The following figure shows the relative composition of genres per year from 2000 to 2006.

Figure 4 indicates the relative proportion of galleries in different genres each year. First, there is no substantial difference in terms of relative proportion of genres throughout the period. The galleries are divided into three groups: paintings, sculptures and photography as a dominant group; drawing, prints and works on paper as a middle group; and all others as a marginal group.

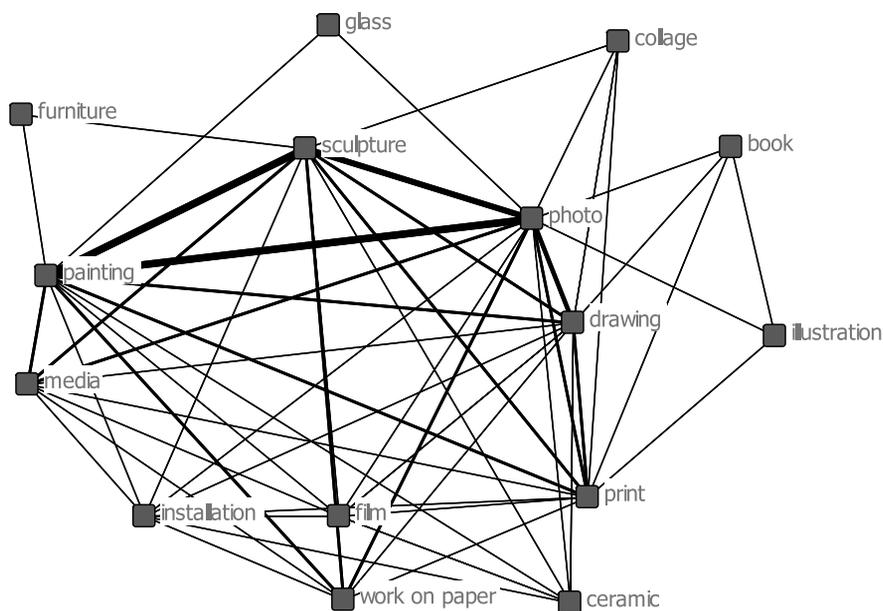
### To Which Genres Do Galleries Diversify?

If photography galleries and non-photography galleries diversify their niches to other genres, what genres do they enter? The dominant group in the above graph indicates that photography shares its niches with sculpture and painting.

A more direct way of examining such a question is to draw a map of the genre-by-genre network.<sup>5</sup> A genre-by-genre network as a type of affiliation network is derived from a gallery-by-genre network. A gallery-by-genre network expresses which genres each gallery enters in a network format. For example, if gallery A enters a photography genre, it is tied to photography. We can derive both a genre-by-genre network and a gallery-by-gallery network from a gallery-by-genre network. For example, a genre-by-genre network indicates a tie between genres, which is established by the same gallery entering both genres. Thus, the more galleries enter genre A and genre B, the stronger tie those two genres have. The thickness of the line in the network map indicates the strength of relationship between genres. Thus, the more galleries simultaneously join two genres, the thicker the line between those two genres. For example, if all the galleries simultaneously join painting and sculpture, those two genres would have the thickest direct tie. If two genres are not directly connected and distanced from each other by a long path of indirect ties, it means that galleries

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<sup>5</sup> For a network approach on markets, see White (2002). For an analysis of affiliation networks, see Wasserman and Faust (1994).



**Figure 5.** A Genre-by-Genre Network in 2006.

tend to choose either one of them without the other. Also, within a map, those genres entered simultaneously by a large number of galleries tend to be directly connected to each other, and they would move towards the center of a map. Also, a map indicates which genres tend to be grouped together by the galleries making a decision on genres. The same logic is applied to a gallery-by-gallery network. In this case, when two galleries enter the same genre such as painting, they are tied directly to each other. The following map shows a genre-by-genre network in 2006.

Based on direct ties and the strength of such ties, we see that photography is directly and strongly tied to both sculpture and painting and, to a lesser extent, drawing. In other words, when New York galleries enter a photography genre, they also tend to include painting, sculpture and drawing. These four genres form a core part of contemporary arts in New York. If we focus on photography, those galleries dealing with photography tend to enter media arts, printing and works on paper. On the other hand, a photography genre tends to be distanced from furniture and other remaining genres. In terms of niche diversification, it can be inferred that galleries are more likely to diversify their genres into rest of the genres, starting with photography, paintings and sculptures.



however, the list of generalists demonstrates a mixed group. For example, the list includes the most prestigious galleries such as Marian Goodman, Paula Cooper, and Luhring Augustine Gallery. At the same time, the list includes relatively less prestigious galleries such as Caelum or Andre Zarre Gallery. In short, the degree of genre diversification or niche width of galleries does not demonstrate a simple correlation between a gallery's status and critical attention.

Before discussing the relationship between genre diversification and status, the driving force behind genre diversification surrounding fine art photography is examined. The *New York Times* article (Gefter, 2006) mentioned at the beginning of this paper states that there is a strong cross-pollination between photography galleries and contemporary art galleries in other media. Analysis above supports such a tendency. The interviews suggest the following four factors as the driving forces of such diversification. First, the cumulative effects of critically acclaimed photography exhibitions by representative art museums such as the Museum of Modern Arts or the Metropolitan Museum since the 1970s make photography legitimate as an art genre.

Second, such a status upgrade of photography promoted the interests of major art collectors beyond their interests in modern and contemporary arts in traditional media. During the interviews, a number of contemporary arts galleries in Chelsea and Uptown pointed out that they started to include photographers and their works in their exhibits at the urgings of their collectors. Contemporary art collectors do not confine their collection to a particular medium. For galleries that started with photography, it was a natural evolution of their galleries to expand their genres to other media in contemporary arts, which have more mainstream collectors with bigger pockets. During an interview in 2006, a specialist at Sotheby's mentioned that the works by Gursky or Struth show how photography and other contemporary art markets have been merging; they can be sold under the category of either photography or contemporary arts in their art auctions. He pointed out, however, that the same work would be priced and sold at a higher price in contemporary art auctions than in photography auctions. This demonstrates that photography galleries would have a strong incentive to approach contemporary art markets and their collectors. If that is the case, then why haven't all photography galleries diversified their niches into painting or sculpture? Gallery owners at Chelsea and Midtown contend that moving to contemporary genres require more capital and physical space usually for bigger art works. More importantly, they added, gallery owners and curators should have professional expertise in evaluating works to decide which artist they would represent. Because it is ultimately the quality of the artists and their works that decide the status of the galleries, they

cannot venture into other genres based on market demands.

Third, contemporary arts have multiple media. For those artists who are trained in contemporary arts, photography is just another medium for artistic expression. Thus, galleries expand their genres when their artists experiment with other genres such as media arts or installation arts.

Finally, art auctions and art fairs for photography have substantially increased recently. Mainstream art fairs such as Basel, Miami, or Armory Show have expanded the share of photography from vintage works to the works of contemporary artists. Art fairs specializing in photography, such as Photo San Francisco or Photo London, have been increasing. As more photography galleries participate in global contemporary art markets, photography as an art genre attracts contemporary arts galleries in other media and their collectors. In other words, recent global art fairs have been a natural ground for cross-pollination between genres.<sup>6</sup>

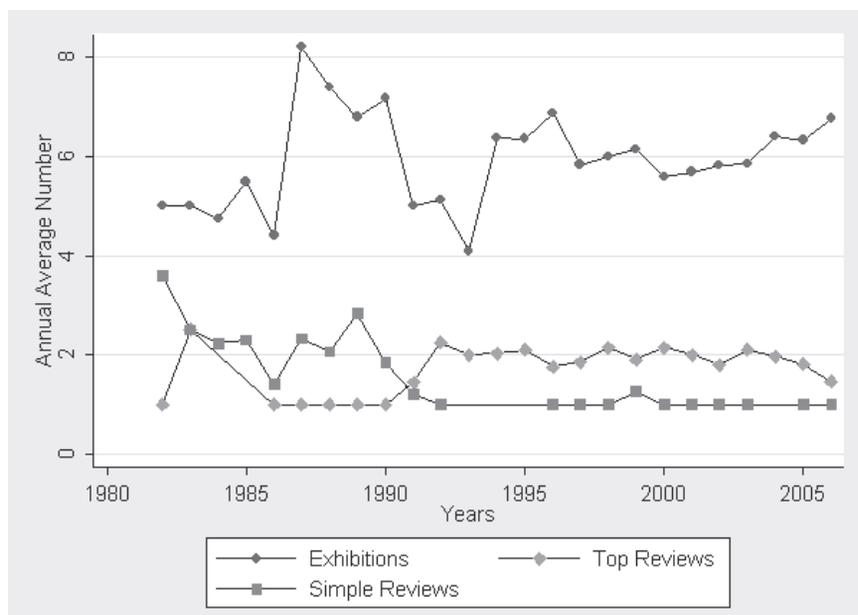
Evolution of genre diversification involves the development of contemporary arts as a genre and strategic decisions of individual galleries and the impact of such decisions. One key impact includes how individual galleries are recognized in a status hierarchy within the art world. I examined the distribution of status positions of art galleries in terms of the number and type of art reviews below.

### Art Reviews and Status Distribution of Galleries

Art auction specialists, galleries and critics, they pointed out that photography as an art genre and an art market established itself during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Based on prices and sales of photographic works at art auctions and art fairs, photography is part of the contemporary art markets. A trend in the type of art reviews that photography galleries have received since 1981 is one way of examining the collective upward mobility of photography as an art genre. The following graph shows the average number of annual

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<sup>6</sup> During the interviews, I observed that the galleries in different regions vary in terms of the level of their participation in different types of art markets (i.e., galleries, auctions and art fairs). The Chelsea galleries, especially recently established ones, tend to rely heavily on art fairs for their business, whereas those galleries on 57th Street tend to participate in select few fairs or minimize their participation. When I asked about such a low level of participation in art fairs, several gallery owners claimed that art fairs were either too uncertain for a stable business or not “appropriate” for aesthetically-oriented galleries. In other words, galleries in different regions vary not only in their genre diversification but also in moral evaluation of different types of art markets. Such moral dimension of art markets will be examined in another paper.



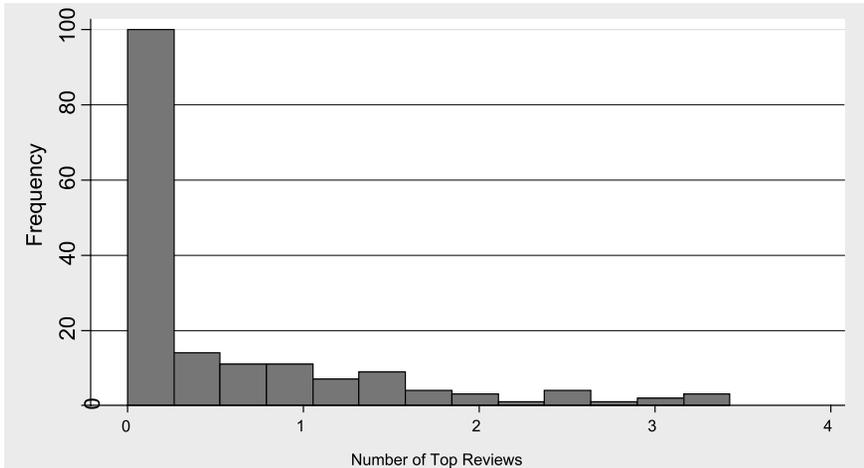
**Figure 7.** Average Number of Annual Exhibitions and Types of Reviews in 1982-2006.

exhibitions as well as top and simple reviews the galleries have received in the *New York Times*.

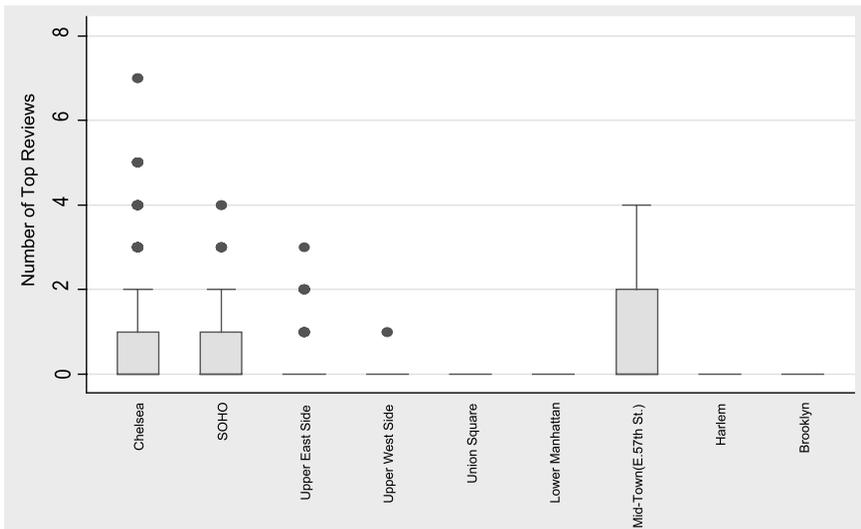
The graph shows that a gallery has about 6 exhibitions on the average annually. The number of exhibitions has been increasing in the 1990s. If top reviews (i.e., exclusive reviews of a single exhibition) indicate a more prestigious recognition of the exhibitions than simple reviews (i.e., reviews that mention an exhibition), reversal of the average number of annual top and simple reviews in the beginning of the 1990s suggests that photography-based galleries have started to receive more critical recognition as an art gallery in the 1990s than in the preceding period.<sup>7</sup>

If we examine the distribution of the reviews, however, it is heavily skewed to the right. Such distribution indicates that only a very small number of galleries monopolize the attention of art critics, thus putting themselves at the top of status hierarchy within the art world. The “winner-take-all” phenomenon of status hierarchy is clear in the following graph.

<sup>7</sup> The graph of art reviews includes the years between 1981 and 2006, not between 2000 and 2006 like the other part of analysis in this paper, because data on genre and other dimensions of galleries are available only from year 2000, whereas the *New York Times* provides a database that goes back to 1981.



**Figure 8.** Distribution of Average Number of Annual Top Reviews of Galleries in 2000-2006.



**Figure 9.** Distribution of Top Reviews Across Regions in 2000-2006.

The average annual percentage of galleries that did not receive top reviews is 65.9%. Such distribution stresses the fact that it is extremely difficult for galleries to receive dedicated art reviews by the *New York Times*. When a gallery's show is reviewed exclusively, high status is attributed. Although there are no sales data of these galleries, we can assume that those high-status galleries would

also dominate art markets in terms of their sales volume and prestigious collectors. During the interview, a gallery owner in Midtown stated: “If my show is not reviewed, it is very hard to have any sales at all (New York interview, 2008).” Increasing number of galleries and degree of competition make prestigious art reviews more crucial for sales.

In the above, I showed that there are regional variations in art genres. Would we observe regional variations in top reviews? The following figure shows that recipients of top reviews are clustered around several regions.

The figure demonstrates that Chelsea, Soho, Midtown and Upper East Side dominate the number of top reviews. Also, within the top regions, there are substantial within-region variations. Such regional comparison reveals that the New York art world has a strong geographical dimension, which outlines a geographical evolution of the art market from Soho to other areas such as Chelsea and Midtown. At the same time, a variety of galleries exists in terms of genres and status within the same region.

### Genre Diversification and Status

What is the relationship between niche width (i.e., the number of genres)

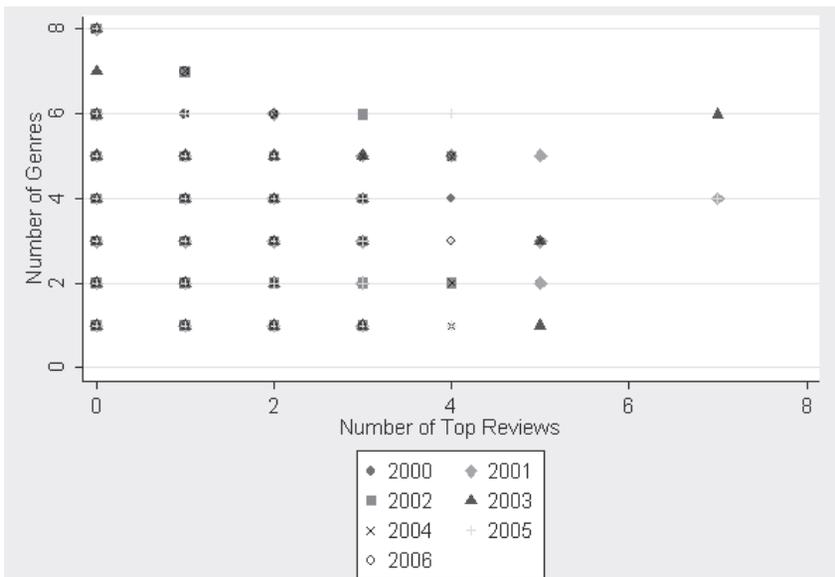


Figure 10. Number of Top Reviews and Genres in 2000-2006.

of galleries and their status? Would it show a positive or negative correlation? A simple Pearson correlation coefficient between the two variables in the aggregate dataset for the years between 2000 and 2006 shows a negative correlation, although it is not statistically significant. I examined the relationship between the number of genres and the average number of *New York Times* top reviews per year to analyze the relationship between status and niche width. The following graph shows the correlation across the years.

Previous studies on niche width and status suggest that there are two types of organizations: those with a positive correlation and those with a negative correlation. The former type includes such organizations as professional service providers or automobile manufacturers, whereas the latter includes such organizations as the beer industry. It can be argued that the latter type of organizations often belong to an organizational population in which the quality of organizations is relatively more uncertain. Thus, such organizations focus on a niche to build a robust identity with strong commitment instead of providing a large volume across a wide range of niches. It can be argued that art galleries belong to the second type in which high-status organization has a narrow scope of niches due to the highly uncertain nature of aesthetic quality of art works.

It can be argued that art genres (or niches) have their own status hierarchy. If we apply the “status-leak” argument to the present cases, the galleries with high status would not enter such genres associated with low status. For example, a high-status publishing company may not want to enter a mass market-oriented cartoon genre. Combining such arguments together, we can conjecture that the galleries with high status would not diversify their niches to a low-status genre. If we can assume that only a small number of genres would have high status, we would observe a negative correlation between the number of top reviews and the number of genres.

The above figure shows a negative slope overall, partly due to the fact that a large number of galleries with multiple genres receive no critical attention. Although it is not a clear U-shape, a number of galleries with more than an average of 2 annual top reviews participate in either one or more of the three genres.<sup>8</sup> The following table lists the galleries with the above average number of top reviews throughout the period of 2000-2006.

The table shows that more galleries that belong to more than three genres

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<sup>8</sup> I ran a negative binomial regression with the number of top reviews as a dependent variable and number of genres and a square of number of genres as independent variables. Although the coefficients of the independent variables were not statistically significant due to a small number of cases, the direction was negative for the number of genres and positive for a square of the number of genre variable.

**Table 2.** Average Number of Annual Top Reviews and Genres Among the Top Performers

Gallery	Top Reviews	Genres	Founding Year	Region
Tibor de Nagy	3.43	2.43	1950	Chelsea
Paula Cooper	3.29	6.00	1968	Chelsea
Marian Goodman	3.29	3.14	1977	Chelsea
Robert Miller	3.14	4.00	1976	Chelsea
Luhring Augustine	3.00	5.00	1985	Chelsea
Cheim & Read	2.71	3.00	1997	Chelsea
Friedrich Petzel	2.57	5.00	1994	Chelsea
Jack Shainman	2.57	4.00	1986	Chelsea
Sonnabend	2.57	3.00	1969	Chelsea
Zabriskie	2.57	1.00	1954	Midtown
Pace Macgill	2.29	1.00	1960	Midtown
Hasted Hunt	2.00	1.00	2005	Chelsea
Marianne Boesky	2.00	1.00	1996	Chelsea

belong to a high-status group as opposed to those galleries in a single genre. In other words, there are a number of generalists in a high-status position. Thus, upon closer inspection, New York art galleries show a more complicated picture of status and niche width relationship; they demonstrate that high-status organizations are able to participate in multiple genres including a low status one such as photography. This is going back to the above mentioned “status spill-over” argument: an organization with a high status affords to enter a low-status niche, and, if a sufficiently large number of organizations follow, a status of such a niche will be upgraded. Consequently, the organization will benefit from the first mover-advantage from that niche. Such status spill-over would be part of a social movement in which a status hierarchy of different segments of a market changes its hierarchical degree or relative positions. Cross-pollination phenomenon that the *New York Times* article points out at the beginning of this paper demonstrates that it is part of a collective upward mobility of the New York photography. In the process, contemporary galleries with high status promoted upgrading of the photography genre by actively representing photographic works, and photography galleries with higher status of its own genre entered other traditionally prestigious genres such as painting or sculpture, thus reinforcing cross-pollination between photography and other genres.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> As an anonymous review points out, such status spill-over effect would appear in any market

## Discussion

In this paper, I examined the genres of New York galleries as niches in art markets and the status of such organizations by focusing on fine art photography. I also analyzed how geographical distribution of galleries is related to genre diversification and other organizational characteristics of galleries. I investigated the relative distance between genres and distribution of galleries across a spectrum of niche width by analyzing affiliation networks of galleries and genres. I also discussed the factors that resulted in mixing or cross-pollination between photography and other genres through the strategies of galleries. Such factors include the collective enhancement of the status of fine art photography within the contemporary art world, corresponding interests of collectors from other contemporary art genres, multi-medium orientation of contemporary artists and, finally, the rise of photography art auctions and art fairs as a new type of market for photography.

I also demonstrated that the number of genres and the number of top reviews seem to have a negative correlation, thus showing the art markets of New York galleries as similar to markets of such as the beer or fashion industry which products have a highly uncertain nature. However, upon closer inspection, the relationship is close to a U-shaped one where generalist and specialist galleries exist on both ends of the spectrum of an aesthetic status hierarchy. As a preliminary account of such relationship, I presented the status spill-over hypothesis in which high-status organizations are able to enter diverse niches with a wide range of status positions, thus exploiting market expansion of a newly rising market segment. All those I interviewed in the New York art markets agreed that a photography genre has been one of the strongest and fastest growing market segments in both the primary market (i.e., galleries) and the secondary market (i.e., auctions and art fairs). Not only did its volume of sales increase rapidly, but the average price of photography also rose substantially. Thus, there has been a rush towards fine art photography from galleries, collectors and museums that have previously paid less attention to such a genre.

Such a quick rise of the photography art market, however, presents a new

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where collective mobility of a niche takes place. However, such effect would be stronger in markets with a high degree of market uncertainty regarding the quality of products or producers. In other words, if it is relatively easy to observe the quality of products or producers, buyers would not rely on the prestige of a producer from its original niche.

source of change from inside and outside the market and can be a double-edged sword for traditional photography galleries. During the interviews, different galleries, often in different regions, offered strong opinions on the identity of photography and how it has been benefiting or suffering from cross-pollination with other mainstream contemporary art genres. For example, some gallery owners argued that a traditional, black-and-white, documentary or “straight” photography is no longer their interest. Although a small number of high-status galleries can maintain their business on vintage works in such style, they claimed, most photography galleries cannot base their business on such works of contemporary artists. Some of these galleries, particularly those in Chelsea, refused the label as photography galleries and called themselves “contemporary art” galleries. Their exhibitions moved towards photograph-based works or media arts and other genres.

Other gallery owners, who mostly started relatively early and belong to Midtown, argued that they would maintain a strong focus on photography as a unique genre. Although they would pursue more “staged” photographic works and not just black-and-white works in documentary style, they demonstrated a strong and robust identity as a photography gallery. Consequently, both camps of the galleries present different, if not contradictory, directions of identity in the photography art world and art market. One direction would put photography more deeply embedded in contemporary arts with better scale of market performance in terms of pricing and sales, whereas the other direction would strengthen the traditional core identity of photography with lower status and pricing of its works in comparison to those of mainstream contemporary art genres.

From a gallery’s point of view, galleries also face different options. A gallery may need to concentrate on a genre to establish its artistic and aesthetic vision to other participants of the art world. Such identity can be even more important because the number of photography galleries has increased rapidly. Even more threatening for photography galleries is an increasing entry of contemporary arts galleries into photography. One of the Chelsea gallery owners who specialize in photography mentioned during an interview that he would need to distinguish its vision as a photography gallery to compete against contemporary arts galleries with much bigger resources including capital, clients and physical spaces. The other option would be to diversify into other genres, taking advantage of much bigger market resources in more mainstream contemporary art genres.

Present work is limited in a number of aspects. In the next steps, we need alternative measures of status, niche width and performance of galleries in

photography and other genres. With more diverse measures of such factors, we would be able to understand more comprehensively the mechanism behind interaction effects between diversification and status of galleries on organizational performance of galleries. For a more causal understanding of genre diversification and performance of cultural organizations in the art world, we need a longitudinal analysis of galleries and their attributes over a longer time period. Third, to understand the identity of galleries, I conducted a discourse analysis of the mission statements of individual galleries and examined how the characteristics of such statements are related to the types of artists and art works they represent. Finally, galleries, artists, art collectors and art critics interact through multiple dimensions of social networks such as friendship, co-work experiences or education. It is crucial to investigate social embeddedness of those key participants in more diverse dimensions to understand the causes, patterns and outcome of diversification within the art world and the art market as social and cultural contexts. Finally, the relationship between genre and status is socially embedded not only in particular art markets but also in social and cultural environments where such art markets exist. Thus, future studies need to be directed toward a comparative study of the same art market across societies with varying cultural hierarchy of different art forms. For example, we can observe a different status order of genres in Korean art markets. Recently, leading contemporary art galleries in Korea started to represent photography as their main portfolios, and an increasing number of specialized photography galleries opened. Such changes demonstrate that the photography genre has also experienced upward mobility in Korea. What is interesting in the Korean case, however, is that leading photographers and their works influenced Korean galleries and the art markets mainly from their successful participation in global art markets, particularly in contemporary art fairs in Berlin, Basel, London and New York. Thus, a comparative study of Korean art and the Western art markets would show how globalization of art markets plays a key role in the relationship between status, genre and mobility within art markets. In such a case, status spill-over would take place across different regional markets. Thus, strategic players with low status within their own domestic market would seek to represent their works in other regional or global markets with higher status for their genre.

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