



The Institute for Southern Contemporary Art (ISCA)

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The Institute for Southern Contemporary Art (ISCA) was founded in 2016 to advance a meaningful alternative to the problem of contemporary art production and its political economy. While technology is intensifying the soft power of speculation, reputation, and the hype of networks, recent changes in technical infrastructure have done very little to shake the narrowly-defined and limited objectives of contemporary art. Technological change alone hasn't curtailed an art field defined by individualism and competition, despite counter-claims made by progressive artists and collectives. Following a long-century of escapist fantasies projected as utopian horizons, there is little to offer up as a functional alternative to an art market spiralling toward ever more comprehensive financialization. At a time when disdain for contemporary art is proliferating, undoing this system accelerating toward stagnation cannot be left to the 'inevitable' unravelling of its internal contradictions. ISCA offers another option by rerouting capital from the contemporary art market to fund a path to working otherwise, culminating in a think-tank and independent program to promote new terms for art production.

Contemporary art is a multi-billion-dollar unregulated market with unclear criteria waiting to be harnessed – and specialized algorithms are the instrument for doing the job. ISCA works to the rubric that art is *produced* as a commodity; it doesn't become one when it is sold. Our institutional model unfolds as a multi-phase project that will, in the first instance, generate a detailed production plan for contemporary art calculated to yield the highest possible market revenue. This gambit will rely on recent advances in machine learning to analyse and model the global art market. Informal networks merely outline power that is crystallized in the price one is willing to pay for an art object. Market data has become a primary driver in shaping matters of taste. And since taste can be fickle, it is high time to let software take command.

The analysis of art market metadata has proved beneficial primarily for collectors, many of whom do very little besides await returns from the derivatives market. Paywall platforms like *ArtRank* and *Art Advisor* offer predictive data as a service to collectors. Meanwhile artists continue to intuit what is otherwise disclosable as quanta. Like many of us, artists deal in specialized knowledge, working in a foggy field of indeterminacy where authentication becomes the primary task – leading many to follow historical determination and act as

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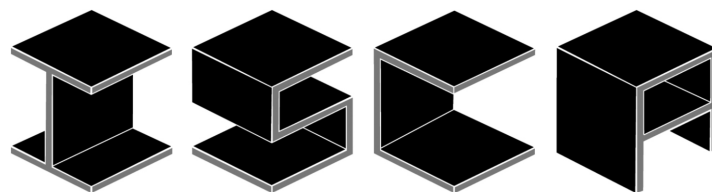
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mediums, sages, priests, and so on. By running a (Bourdiesian) social distinction model on a computational system, the reality of art markets is augmented to a model of reality. In accordance, the ISCA algorithm encodes a chain of inferences made by contemporary art experts, financial analysts, and critical theorists. But in the end there is no better predictor of taste than the habits of anointed tastemakers.

As contemporary art markets become increasingly gamified, the more adept the ISCA algorithm becomes in modelling detailed production plans for art that can successfully enter the market flow. In its second phase, ISCA will deploy a production plan for contemporary art products to be sold under the ISCA imprimatur. But like any other creative expression, algorithmic art requires interpretation – a human touch. Authorship and individuality are key factors for quantifying artistic value. Collectors expect it. So, just about all ISCA production will be outsourced. A crowd-working system will hire technicians marked by the highest reputational rankings: painters, welders, but also coders and 3D designers. Luckily there is a large labor pool to draw from. Most art schools have turned vocational.

Contemporary art is not only an alternative currency but the currency to drive an alternative. Once ISCA has gathered adequate symbolic capital from a reputation garnered through its disruptive institutional model, it will transition-up to the role of gatekeeper, setting a premium on in-house contemporary art products. Revenue from these activities will bootstrap the third and culminating phase of ISCA's institutional plan: a think-tank and space for the production of knowledge that can eclipse the inherited stasis of contemporary art. ISCA is a cybernetic system, which will train the heart and the mind. The goal of automating contemporary art is to ultimately become emancipated from it.

The ISCA will be advanced under the umbrella of *Contemporary.Institute*, where its institutional framework can be enhanced through collaboration with others working on the problem of contemporary art. Please visit our website *Contemporary.Institute* for updates.



INSTITUTE *for* SOUTHERN CONTEMPORARY ART

João Enxuto and **Erica Love** are artists and writers living in New York City. Their writing has appeared in *Art in America*, *Mousse Contemporary Art Magazine*, *Wired*, and *X-TRA Contemporary Art Quarterly*. They have given talks and exhibited work at the Centre Pompidou, Whitney Museum of Art, the New Museum, Anthology Film Archives, Walker Art Center, Yossi Milo Gallery, Carriage Trade, Louisiana Museum in Denmark, ArtCenter/South Florida, and the Tamayo Museum in Mexico City.