




# Hans Ulrich Obrist on Why We Need Artists in Politics

ARTSY EDITORIAL  
BY HANS ULRICH OBRIST

SEP 18TH, 2017 8:00 AM



Portrait of Hans Ulrich Obrist by Juergen Teller.

It wasn't your typical presidential campaign announcement: no flags, no podium, no Make Cuba Great Again baseball caps. The Cuban artist Tania Bruguera, seated in an office chair in an empty room, was speaking with me via videolink during a talk at the Creative Time Summit in October 2016, when she said she would run for president of Cuba in 2018. 



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perspectives in society. I trace this idea back to the British artist, educator and provocateur John Latham, who dedicated his life to creating a worldview that would unify science and the humanities.

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He believed the world could only be changed by those willing and able to conceive of reality in a holistic and intuitive manner. The individual best equipped to do this, Latham suggested, is the artist. To that end, Latham was a co-founding member of the Artist Placement Group (APG) (1966–89), along with Barbara Steveni, Jeffrey Shaw, David Hall, Anna Ridley, and Barry Flanagan, an initiative that was to expand the reach of art and artists into wider society.

Latham's disregard for disciplinary boundaries was underpinned by "flat time theory," a philosophy of time that he developed throughout his life. The theory proposed that we shift towards a time-based cosmology—aligning social, economic, political, and aesthetic structures as a sequence of events and recording of knowledge patterns—in place of our sensory and spatially-dominated view of the world. Believing that the linear and accumulative understanding of both time and history was a farce, he proposed an "event structure" which radically reconfigures reality, allowing for an understanding of the universe that encompasses all disciplines together.

I first encountered the brilliance of Latham's work when Douglas Gordon took me, in person, to Flat Time House, Latham's then-home in Peckham, South East London, in 1994. Gordon was adamant that this meeting happen—in fact, the recording of this visit which has been discovered in my archive begins with both Gordon and me in a taxi on our way to meeting Latham.





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John Latham, *Five Sisters*, 1976, in "A World View: John Latham" at Serpentine Gallery, London (1 March 2017 – 21 May 2017). Image © Lu Hayes. Courtesy of Serpentine Gallery.

In that conversation, Gordon explains how he was influenced by Latham's description of the Incidental Person, a figure whose role in society was to develop new ways of thinking, and which underpinned APG's mission to place artists in influential positions in society. *Five Sisters* is a display realised in collaboration with Richard Hamilton and Rita Donagh that documents Latham's APG placement at the Scottish Office, where bings of coal waste were declared as a monument, or indeed, an anti-monument. Latham also suggested that these bings be preserved as such and declared as a site of national heritage. On the occasion of the John Latham exhibition at the Serpentine Galleries we reactivated the APG and invited artist Pedro Reyes to be in dialogue with the different departments of London City Hall.

Gordon was particularly drawn to the implication that social boundaries and designations were fluid, that "none of us are particularly bound to the time or place in which we are now." This is a radical idea because it illustrates that change is possible, and that it can happen swiftly.

Through his radical legacy, Latham is a proto-artist for our present moment. He thought of the artist as fulfilling a specific role in society, carving out a free space in which radical ideas could be explored.





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the democratization of art, famously stating that **EVERYONE IS AN ARTIST**, and teaching that art, like politics, is something in which we all participate. Beuys's "extended definition of art" included the idea of social sculpture as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, for which he claimed a creative, participatory role in shaping society and politics. Like Latham, his trajectory was characterized by passionate, even acrimonious public debate. He made his life and work into an open forum for the discussion of radical new ideas. Beuys showed how art could provide society with the space it needs for imagination.



documenta 7 expects ~~everybody~~<sup>man</sup> to do his duty.  
 documenta 7 verlangt von ~~jedem~~<sup>jedem</sup>, daß ~~er~~<sup>jeder</sup> seine Pflicht tut.

Joseph Beuys  
1982

Joseph Beuys  
Documenta 7, 1982  
ArtWise

As with Latham, Beuys's lectures, political activism and action opened up the "agonistic space" recently identified by political theorist Chantal Mouffe as vital to the practice of democracy. Mouffe says that democracy should allow for difference and diversity—which inevitably leads to managed conflict—rather than seek to achieve consensus. This "agonistic" approach encourages rather than suppresses <sup>^</sup> antagonistic debate. It can be related, I think, to Edouard Glissant's ideas about homogeneity, diversity,

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Latham and Beuys, among others, taught that art is a space in which real debates can happen, and how that can be translated into political action. Indeed in the course of his life, Beuys founded or co-founded the following political organizations: the German Student Party (1967), the Organization for Direct Democracy Through Referendum (1971), the Free International University for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research (1974), and most famously the German Green Party (1980). As a teenager, I came across a lecture by Beuys. He talked about the “production of reality,” social sculpture, and founding the Green Party. He called society a “sculptural structure,” one that needs healing from itself. He spoke about how change is by definition a creative action; so any progressive politics requires free thought. In a society that has forgotten how to think creatively, change is impossible. Art, which teaches us to think creatively and to imagine new possibilities, is essential to society and to politics.



Installation view of “A World View: John Latham” at Serpentine Gallery, London (1 March 2017 – 21 May 2017). Image © Luke Hayes. Courtesy of Serpentine Gallery.



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past 50 years. They are public intellectuals who embedded themselves in the social and political fabric of their societies, conceiving of art that something that takes place within—rather than outside—communal life.

The artist Bruce Conner ran for supervisor of San Francisco in 1967. His legendary campaign, the statement for which was a discourse on light, was a reminder that in a true democracy all voices should be heard, no matter how far they seem from the mainstream. It is interesting that Conner, for all that he was a member of the counterculture, voted in every election and was very critical of friends who didn't vote. His campaign gave an option to those who were dissatisfied with the status quo. In this way, too, art can be a lightning rod for the large part of our electorates who feel disenfranchised by the options with which they are presented.



Tania Bruguera's announcement, made in October 2016, that she would run for president of Cuba in 2018. Video via YouTube.





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remains a close friend of the artist Anri Sala. We must understand his program in the framework of Beuys's social sculpture. Art is not separate from politics in this view, but coextensive with it. He is "rethinking democracy," as Sala said in a conversation with me. When Rama first became Mayor of Tirana, he said that "It's the most exciting job in the world, because I get to invent and to fight for good causes everyday. Being the mayor of Tirana is the highest form of conceptual art. It's art in a pure state." This history deserves a more comprehensive appraisal than I can offer in this short text, because it seems to me integral to our understanding of contemporary art and politics.

Rama followed that statement through with his extraordinary "clean and green project." In an echo of Beuys's famous *7,000 Oak Trees* project at Documenta in 1980, he organized the planting of 1,800 trees around the city and introduced almost 100,000 square meters of green space. He also ordered the painting of many old buildings in what have come to be known as "Edi Rama" colours, a project recorded in Sala's extraordinary film *Dammi i Colori*, a video meandering between documentation and art work. This was a cheap, effective and enormously popular means of improving the urban environment, and changing the dialogue around a city that had experienced a troubled recent past. His understanding of the relationship between art and politics was summed up in a quote that I find extremely inspirational. He said: "Culture is infrastructure, it is not mere surface."

In this way art and culture is not a luxury, but rather an absolutely essential component in the proper functioning of a society. Art is about communicating, engaging, and interacting, and any organization that does not foster these relationships is inevitably doomed to failure. Speaking about painting the city of Tirana, Rama says:

*The interventions in the buildings were not aesthetic interventions, but an attempt to reopen a path of communication between the individual citizen, the environment, and the authorities. Entering into a process of transformation means, first of all, trying to give a sense of community by making signs.*





The idea of art as infrastructure, as “social sculpture,” has also been developed in an exemplary way by Theaster Gates, whose expanded practice of art includes the Rebuild Foundation, a nonprofit which seeks to introduce shared spaces and affordable housing initiatives into under-resourced communities in the artist’s native Chicago. He has turned derelict buildings into cultural institutions such as the Archive House, which holds 14,000 architecture books from a closed bookshop, and the Stony Island Savings Bank into the Stony Island Arts Bank, containing the book collection of John H. Johnson, founder of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines, and the record collection of Frankie Knuckles, the godfather of house music, among other things. These are spaces open to the community, in which culture and political action is not only exhibited but enacted, engaged in, and fostered.

Artists’ political interventions can also take the form of provocations. The artist Christian Schlingensiefel told me shortly before his death how much Beuys meant to him. He witnessed Beuys speak when he was a teenager in 1976. Though he admitted that he did not understand all of it at the time, he remembers Beuys provoking Schlingensiefel’s father—by predicting that the social system would collapse within seven years. When the seven years had passed, Schlingensiefel asked his father if he remembered the prediction. “Yes,” said the father, “I put a note in my calendar which has been there for seven years, and now I can say it did not happen.” But the really “exciting and interesting thing,” Schlingensiefel pointed out, was that Beuys had made his father think about the prospect for seven years. Art cannot predict the future, but it can act upon the way we behave in the present.

Schlingensiefel’s body of work included a series of actions and provocations intended to jolt German society into recognizing its own flaws. He once famously invited Germany’s unemployed population, which numbered in the millions, to swim in Lake Wolfgang, where Chancellor Helmut Kohl was holidaying. Schlingensiefel’s plan was that these legions of bathers entering the lake would flood Kohl’s nearby holiday home. The project was doomed to failure—only a few dozen people entered the lake—but it attracted enormous media attention, not because it flooded Kohl’s house but because it addressed an issue of national importance in a manner calculated to generate awareness. This is one way in which artists can affect the institutions of power: by organizing actions or interventions that highlight neglected issues. We could also speak of the bravery of Octavio Paz, who spent his life speaking out against totalitarianism and who memorably said that “There can be no society without poetry.”







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Stony Island Arts Bank. Photo by Tom Harris, © Hedrich Blessing. Courtesy of Rebuild Foundation.

The poet and novelist Eileen Myles used humor to disrupt the political process. In 1991, she announced that she was standing as the only “openly female” candidate in the U.S. presidential race. Her write-in campaign from the East Village quickly spiraled into a project of national interest, an opportunity for those denied a voice by mainstream politics to make themselves heard. Her participation in the political process was part performance project, part protest, and part joke. Nonetheless, she exhibited more political integrity than anyone else running.

Our project *Do It* began in Paris in 1993 as a result of a discussion with the artists Christian Boltanski and Bertrand Lavier about how to make exhibitions more flexible and open-ended. The conversation developed into the question of whether a show could be made from —scores or written instructions by artists, which could then be openly interpreted every time they were presented. How would an artist’s work be transformed if others made the artwork? For the project Eileen wrote a text called “HOW TO RUN FOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.” The text is a reminder that, even in these frightening times, democracy belongs to the people and that art is a means of reclaiming it:

*You know, they really can't stop you. In except for maybe two states, Nevada being one, any citizen can be a written-in candidate. In New York, for instance, you simply need 33 of your friends to sign affidavits saying*



This text is an extended version of a talk I gave at the Creative Time Summit when Tania Bruguera announced her candidacy. In a country that has never held a democratic election her statement has taken on renewed significance since the death of former leader Fidel Castro in the month after she made the announcement.

The decision is an extension of her lifelong project to address political and humanitarian issues in Cuba through performances and social movements. Tania practices ‘Arte Útil’—literally, useful art—and has developed long-term projects that include a community center, political party for immigrants, and an institution working towards civic literacy and policy change in Cuba. Bruguera describes ‘Arte Útil’ as follows, and I think it serves as a good introduction to her work:

*I really wanted to rethink the role of the art institution in terms of political effectiveness. I kept encountering limitations while doing my work, but in the process, I found a great group of artists and artworks that had already been dealing with the same issues for a long time. I could identify them with what I called Arte Útil because they went beyond complaining about social problems and instead tried to change them by implementing different solutions. They were not only imagining impossible utopian situations (which is what most artists do), but they were also trying to build practical utopias.*






Tania Bruguera

*Dignity Has No Nationality*, 2017

Creative Time: Pledges of Allegiance

Tania founded the Migrant People Party (MPP) in 2006, aiming to create a new form of political organization, and then created the Immigrant Movement International as a long-term art project in the form of a socio-political movement. For the work, the artist spent a year operating a flexible community space in Queens, New York, engaging with local and international communities as well as working with social service organizations, elected officials, and artists focused on immigration reform. Public workshops, events, actions, and partnerships encouraged immigrants to consider the values that they shared and to foster ties within the community. This was politics as art, on the ground, changing lives.

Bruguera also created an institute in Cuba with the aim of fostering civic literacy and advocating policy change. Calling itself a “wish tank,” the institute uses public actions and performances with “cubanos de a pie” (everyday Cubans): from housewives to professionals, from activists to students. “It is about creating bridges of trust where there is no fear of each other, to create a peaceful and considered response where there is violence, to create a place where people from different political views can come together,” she said in a description of the work. 

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nomage to the ambitions of the ARG, which positioned the artist as an incidental person within existing social and political structures to effect change. Tania is among those artists applying the lessons taught by artists such as John Latham to the present moment.

—Hans Ulrich Obrist

*Hans Ulrich Obrist is the Artistic Director of the Serpentine Galleries in London. He would like to thank Melissa Blanchflower, Stefano Boeri, Joseph Constable, Ben Eastham, Amira Gad, Laura Norman, Laura Macfarlane, Yana Peel, Max Shackleton, Nato Thompson, and Alexandra Wilk.*

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# How Helen Frankenthaler Pioneered a New Form of Abstract Expressionism







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Gordon Parks, *Untitled*, New York, New York, 1956. © The Gordon Parks Foundation. Courtesy of The Gordon Parks Foundation.



Helen Frankenthaler  
*Eve*, 1995  
Hamilton-Selway Fine Art

In 1956, the Abstract Expressionist painter Helen Frankenthaler was photographed by Gordon Parks for a spread in *LIFE* magazine. Lovers of Abstract Expressionism will recall that several years earlier, in 1949, Jackson Pollock had been photographed for the magazine, appearing alongside an article lede that read: “Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?”

Beyond introducing Pollock and the young movement to a popular audience, the 1949 *LIFE* spread also effectively indicated what an Abstract Expressionist should look like. Pollock is depicted standing before one of his drip paintings in a pigment-spattered jacket, smoking a cigarette and wearing a defiant frown.





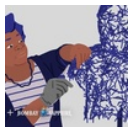
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or artistic purpose, is for tough, complicated men to pour their expressive force into large paintings with urgent, even violent gestures. (After 1952, the gestural impulse in Abstract Expressionism would lead to the classification Action Painting.)



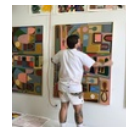
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Mounts One-Night-  
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## The Art of Spotting “Sleepers,” the Misattributed Masterpieces That Earn Dealers Millions

ARTSY EDITORIAL  
BY NINA SIEGAL  
SEP 29TH, 2017 4:30 PM







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Rembrandt van Rijn, *Rembrandt Laughing*, 1628. Courtesy of the Getty Museum.




Rembrandt van Rijn, *Unconscious Patient (Allegory of Smell)*, 1624- Image via Wikimedia Commons.

In 2015, Paris dealer Bertrand Talabardon spotted a painting in an online sales catalogue from a small, New Jersey auction house. Listed as a “Continental School” work by an unknown 19th-century painter, the pre-sale estimate was a humble \$500 to \$800.

Talabardon was pretty sure that was off the mark. As a specialist in Old Master paintings, he could tell that it was an early 17th-century Dutch painting—possibly by a young Rembrandt or, if not, by his purported teenage studio-mate, Jan Lievens.

Although the photograph in the catalogue wasn’t very good, Talabardon and his partner Bertrand Gautier decided to go for it. Another dealer had the same hunch, and the resulting bidding war drove the price up to \$870,000. Talabardon and Gautier prevailed and, almost immediately, received confirmation from Rembrandt expert Ernst van de Wetering that the work was genuine: It was one of a series of paintings of the five senses that Rembrandt made when he was only 18 or 19.

They sold the small oil painting, *The Unconscious Patient (Allegory of Smell)* (c. 1624–25), to art collector Thomas S. Kaplan for \$5 million—more than five times the purchase price. Now it resides in Kaplan’s extensive Leiden Collection of Dutch Golden Age paintings, one of 11 Rembrandts the  billionaire has acquired over the years.



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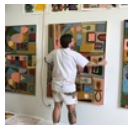
that, because of the oversight of an expert, is priced far below its actual value. A thriving culture has developed around the search for such sleepers. In a sense, all dealers who handle Old Masters, antiques, and antiquities are constantly on the lookout for such works (although they usually call them “discoveries” once they’re identified). They are joined by a handful of museum curators and individual treasure hunters who fancy themselves sleeper-spotters as well.

Most sleepers are found at local auction houses, flea markets, or even carpet sales, where organizers just don’t have the resources to accurately attribute major works of art. But they have been known to pop up at international outfits such as Sotheby’s and Christie’s from time to time. Christie’s South Kensington branch, for example, was a fertile source of sleepers until it closed earlier this year, said Hazlitt Group chairman Brian Allen.

The Hazlitt Group includes the Old Master art dealership Hazlitt, Gooden & Fox, known for its high success rate with sleepers. They’ve discovered works by Anthony van Dyck and the Rembrandt self-portrait *Rembrandt Laughing* (c. 1626), which they bought at an English country auction in 2007 and later sold to the J. Paul Getty Museum—reportedly for tens of millions of dollars.

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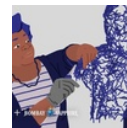
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## Guggenheim Exhibition Embroiled in Animal Cruelty Controversy—and the 9 Other Biggest News Stories This Week





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ARTSY EDITORIAL

SEP 29TH, 2017 3:59 PM

# 01 The Guggenheim pulled three artworks featuring live animals from a forthcoming exhibition amid protests against alleged animal cruelty.

(via *The Guardian* and *the New York Times*)

The Guggenheim blamed unspecified but “explicit and repeated threats of violence” for the removal of the pieces, two videos and one sculpture, from “Art and China after 1989: Theater of the World,” which opens to the public October 6th. Controversy around the exhibition erupted late last week and initially centered on *Dogs That Cannot Touch Each Other* (2003), a video piece by artists Sun Yuan and Peng Yu that shows restrained dogs on treadmills attempting to fight one another. The work quickly drew criticism, with a petition calling for “cruelty-free” exhibits at the museum gaining 40,000 signatures in less than 24 hours. *A Case Study of Transference* (1994), a video showing live pigs mating, and *Theater of the World*, the exhibition’s titular work of live insects and reptiles devouring each other, will also not be shown. While animal rights activists and some art historians applauded the move, critics charge that the museum is censoring the works. PEN America called it “a major blow to artistic freedom.” Artist Ai Weiwei, whose work is included in the show, also critiqued the museum. “When an art institution cannot exercise its right for freedom of speech, that is tragic for a modern society,” he told the *Times*.

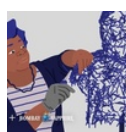
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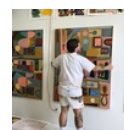
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What the Trump Tax Plan Means for Art Collectors and Dealers



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New York Dealer Mounts One-Night-Only Shows to Boost Urgency—and Sales






# Boost Urgency—and Sales

ARTSY EDITORIAL  
BY SCOTT INDRISEK  
SEP 29TH, 2017 1:01 PM



Austin Eddy in his studio with paintings destined for his one-night exhibition. Courtesy of Half Gallery.

Café Henrie, in lower Manhattan, is a cozily chic daytime spot. Its interior looks like the Memphis Group redecorated a hip primary-school classroom. The venue is owned by André Saraiva, a graffiti artist, creative entrepreneur, and—by *GQ*'s reckoning—"international playboy," a man who once exhibited a sculpture at nearby gallery The Hole that resembled a coin-operated, rideable purple penis.

Saraiva is turning over his venue for a few evenings this fall to Bill Powers, the dealer behind New  York's Half Gallery, who is eager to kickstart the sort of art-and-nightlife crossovers that characterized



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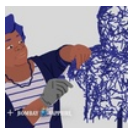
What Powers envisions is a succession of single-evening art shows, although he avoids the term “pop-up.” “I like to go with ‘one-off,’ “ he tells me, the day before the series debuts with four paintings by Austin Eddy. “Pop-up’ sounds like we’re selling skater hoodies.”

Powers isn’t abandoning Half Gallery anytime soon. Instead, he sees “One Night Only” as a way to reconnect with the bustling community he had to leave behind when his gallery decamped from the Lower to the Upper East Side, back in 2013. “There’s a part of me that misses that,” he admits, “when we’d have a Geoff McFetridge opening downtown, and there’d be 300 people on the street.”

The set-up for Café Henrie is simple, at least for the launch. The plain peg-board walls are hung with four large canvases by Eddy, a much-admired New York painter whose last solo in the city was with the now-shuttered Taymour Grahne Gallery. Eddy is no stranger to alternative exhibition models; along with his partner, Shara Hughes, he runs Eddy’s Room, an exhibition space in their Greenpoint, Brooklyn, apartment.

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The 15 New York Shows You Need to See This October



What the Trump Tax Plan Means for Art Collectors and Dealers







## and Dealers

ARTSY EDITORIAL  
BY ANNA LOUIE SUSSMAN  
SEP 29TH, 2017 12:22 PM



President Donald Trump addresses supporters as he speaks at the Indiana State Fairgrounds & Event Center September 27, 2017 in Indianapolis, Indiana. Trump spoke about the proposed Republican tax reform plan. Photo by Joshua Lott/Getty Images.

The White House's framework for tax code reform, while thin on details, could have implications for art collectors and art-related businesses, experts said.

The nine-page proposal, released Wednesday, promises "more jobs, fairer taxes, and bigger paychecks." It proposes eliminating many itemized deductions, and lowering the number of tax brackets to three from a current seven, to make filing taxes simpler. Lobbying groups have already jumped into the fray.

President Donald Trump has touted his tax plan's benefits for the middle-class and has said it must be at least as progressive as the current tax code (meaning it will not shift the burden onto lower earners),



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In addition to lowering the highest individual income tax rate to 35% from a current 39.6%, it outlines several measures, such as repealing the estate tax and changing tax rates for small businesses, that could impact how art buyers and dealers operate.

For example, repealing the current 40% tax for estates valued at above \$5.49 million “may significantly impact how collectors approach their estate planning,” said Micaela Saviano, who leads Deloitte Tax LLP’s art and finance practice. “Currently, collectors with taxable estates need to plan to address the significant estate tax on their art—an illiquid asset. Eliminating the estate tax would change that dynamic and perhaps motivate individuals to rethink where and to whom their art will go after their death.”

One thing the proposed reforms do not address, though, is how the tax code will treat inherited assets that have appreciated in value. Diana Wierbicki, who leads the global art practice of law firm Withers Worldwide, gave the example of a parent who would like to give a Willem de Kooning painting, purchased originally for \$1 million but currently worth \$3 million, to their child.

Under current tax law, the child would receive what’s called a “stepped-up basis” of the current value, in this case, \$3 million, when they inherit it. That means that upon selling it, capital gains taxes are levied on the profit from a higher, or stepped-up, “basis.” So if the child were to sell it for \$3.5 million in several years’ time, capital gains taxes would apply only to \$500,000 profit, rather than a profit of \$2.5 million from the parent’s original purchase price.

“If you get rid of the estate tax, what are you doing with the step-up in basis for income tax purposes?” Wierbicki asked. “You get a step up in basis for income tax, so when things are later sold, you pay less on the appreciation. Or is the child going inherit this \$3 million piece, but they are then limited to the \$1 million basis? That’s what we have to watch for to see.”

Nor does the proposal address whether tax rates for capital gains on art will be maintained. Taxpayers can choose whether to categorize, say, the profit from selling that de Kooning as either capital gains or ordinary income. Collectibles and art are subject to a capital gains tax of 28%, versus the highest income bracket tax of nearly 40%.

“The framework is silent with respect to the continuation of special capital gains tax rates,” said Saviano. “The possibility exists that the 28% rate now applicable to art sales may not be preserved into the future.”

That silence also raises questions for art dealers, who have to choose how to structure their businesses and how to categorize their art sales. The new proposal suggests lowering the maximum tax rate for small businesses to 25%, which means art dealers may be better off characterizing profits from art sales

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“The question becomes, will they want to recharacterize how they hold art?” said Wierbicki.

The proposal retains existing deductions for residential mortgages and charitable contributions, explaining that “[t]hese tax benefits help accomplish important goals that strengthen civil society, as opposed to dependence on government: homeownership and charitable giving.” Wierbicki and Saviano noted the maintenance of the charitable giving deduction means museums and other arts institutions that rely heavily on philanthropic donations can breathe easy for now.

Many observers have noted that it is now up to congressional committees to figure out how to turn the proposal into actual legislation, and little can be known for sure until they present more concrete plans.

“While some of the headline changes might seem attractive to high-net-worth clients, the devil will be in the forthcoming details,” said Jonathan Traub, managing principal of tax policy for Deloitte Tax LLP.

—Anna Louie Sussman

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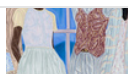
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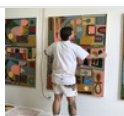


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