

Jurisdictional Exemptions

Duty-Free Art School

So what is an art freeport? What is a “duty-free” art school?

A freeport is an economic-free zone/territory with a physical location, often in tax-free zones or international transportation hubs like a harbour/port or an airport – the one Christopher Nolan blew up with a Boeing 747 in his film. It is a warehouse (with advanced security systems and strictly controlled temperature and humidity), and a hub for capital free-flow (where transitions can be made without even moving – importing and exporting – goods, therefore, nor paying taxes to any nation/state). These (art)works in storage, thus, are commodities waiting to be traded on the market, like in the stock exchange that never sleeps.

Goods in freeports are technically in transit, even if in reality the ports are used more and more as permanent homes for accumulated wealth. The free port is thus a zone for permanent transit. (Steyerl, 2016, p.80)

A freeport is an extraterritorial enclave, bypassing the jurisdiction of all countries with the privilege to keep the discretion of its clients (gallery owners and collectors for most of the time) and exchanges (made by offshore shell companies), off the record. The artworks are free from national taxation and from social responsibilities they once burdened.

International art freeports in Geneva, Singapore and now Beijing are non-designated art spaces but they may hold the largest number of artworks in the world, for sale. They are also places for exhibitions, private viewing and appreciation of artworks. That is the regulation of the art world. However, is it everything about art, with all exhibitions, criticisms, storage, auctions, art fairs and Biennales orbiting around the value of exchange? Art students may not say so.



Picture: A scene from Nolan's film, *Tenet*, 2020

JF— In *Duty-Free* you talk about the “withdrawal” of artworks to freeport art storage spaces. These are works we’ll probably never see. They exist, they’re somewhere, they’re very valuable, but they’re hidden.

HS— The best reaction I’ve heard about this was from an audience member in Moscow who said, “This is great! We don’t have to see all this art. This is hideous auction art. We don’t want to burn it, we don’t want to destroy it, so let’s just hide it.”

Picture: *Duty-Free Art* exhibition catalogue, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2015, p.165

At Chelsea College of Arts, a stone’s throw from the prestigious British art institute, Tate Britain, the Marquee (where this exhibition is held) is such territory of exemption.

Students from the college are fully aware of the tension between their creations and the masterpieces or established artists’ works exhibited just a few steps away, but the border between the two institutions is as uncrossable as the border between two countries. Same to other art schools. But there are still exceptions.

De-installed from degree shows, art students’ works now occupy the school’s corridors and even the dining hall, leaving their studios clean and tidy during the summer holiday – just as they were instructed by the school. To solve this thorny problem of not having a studio to use and store their artworks (especially during summers), art students have developed a new ecology of circulation of artworks. Artworks made in art school studios can be easily disassembled, put into tiny spaces for temporary storage and reassembled quickly for the next exhibition, though many of the artworks made by art students last as long as the exhibition they attend, with a lifespan of three days or a week. The longest, for most international art students, will be no longer than the one-year visa permission for a master’s degree. The presence of these haphazardly stashed artworks in the “non-designated art space” is a stark contrast to the school’s empty studios. These artworks in their status of temporal storage, therefore, become heterogeneous elements to the art school, and to the warehouse for “permanent collection”.

From: Andy Marshall <andy.marshall@cam.ac.uk>
Date: Monday, 11 July 2022 at 1:43 pm
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: Duty-Free Art Exhibition / Freeport Art School

Hi [REDACTED],

I’m afraid I don’t. All the specialist art shippers I know of will most likely be too expensive for most students and in my experience students often then use more generic ‘man with a van’ type services.

Do keep me updated on the exhibition and good luck!

[REDACTED]

Picture: Email correspondence with a London-based curator and art school tutor

Being turned into an art warehouse, the Marquee is an enclave like an international art freeport, situated in between the two well-known art institutions while neither commits responsibilities to control. It keeps and values the heterogeneity brought by the works of art students, something that neither art schools nor the art world can deal with. As such, it demonstrates the possibility of escaping the control of the two, rather than the other way around in art freeports or art school degree shows.