



## “Art and business: challenges and opportunities for collaboration“

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### Conversation highlights:

#### **Matthias Mühlring:**

Whenever we talk about creativity, we run into this major prejudice: the notion that artists are people who are creative, who drink a lot of alcohol and sit around doing nothing until inspiration strikes. And then there's everybody else, the people who go to bed early, because they have to get up early and go into the office. They have to struggle for any kind of inspiration, they have to form teams and organize workshops to get anywhere, creativity just isn't their thing. But for me that's nonsense. Anyone can be creative. I think it's silly to insist on a separation between business and art, between creative and uncreative people.

It may be hard for people who don't know the art world from the inside to believe, but it can be an extremely restrictive place. It's not that free or that creative. Every system imposes its own set of rules that you need to comply with and certain codes that you need to be able to understand.

If you have a project that you're developing for a museum, there will almost always be concrete expectations and a clear goal for the end result. Economic considerations influence the process at every stage. You're expected to deliver things like attracting a certain number of visitors or getting good reviews. It can feel like a straitjacket. Artists can be afraid too and being an artist is a profession like any other. The smaller the institution, the greater the financial pressure. Competition is also increasing, you need to have a lot to offer, although good artists often have their pick of the opportunities.

Partnerships are always a challenge. Companies can learn a lot from museums. Museums are lively democracies, which gives them legitimacy; they engage with current events; they are bastions of civil society; they show tolerance and set an example for people coexisting together. ...Societies are stable when they are balanced and fair. That's the foundation of every kind of work. The artist is the perfect example of the flexible employee, which is after all the ideal employee in the neoliberal economy: he's a freelancer, uninsured, working constantly, traveling a lot, going where the work is...which leaves us with the question: is that good for a person? The need to be constantly flexible is harmful. At its core, the art industry is extremely unfair—many artists have to struggle their entire lives. Scholarships are a place where companies can help and take on some responsibility.

On the one hand, museums represent the places where they're based, like an opera house or theater. On the other hand, they need to be as creatively free as possible. A company will have a hard time finding excellent employees if they don't have any concerts, exhibitions, etc., to go to.

#### **Mark Möllenbruck:**

It does happen that companies buy a ready-made corporate identity for themselves, but it's better if the identity grows and develops organically from within. It's important for us to make connections, to build bridges to the world's art and cultures. An image needs to be backed up by something substantial for it to be associated with a company in the long term. If that's not the case, then it will seem like an interchangeable, random concept. A lot of marketing today makes promises that can't be kept; cultural competency can help prevent that from happening.

It's exciting when different lifestyles and ways of working collide, so when a company—especially a company with sound finances, where things can be quite restricted, where moderation is often the best policy—when a company like that is exposed to the brave, decisive, radical, and pioneering in art, it can free up ideas and empower people.

Companies also need to take positions, and not just develop and sell their products. This becomes especially important for firms in crisis. A strong company culture can orient employees, give them a sense of identity to coalesce around.

Continuity in a partnership is important, but people have different amounts of tolerance for reflection. Image and other immaterial values are hard to measure, so communication needs to be strong.



**Hannes Wohlgemuth:**

For me, the creative process is the common denominator between business and the arts. A firm needs to be able to master and control it, and use it as a motor to keep developing. Engagement with art can be one way of securing a company's future. Of course, there are other ways too. We try to get staff involved with the process, motivate them that way, so that they can get a fresh look at things from a perspective that they might not otherwise have.

ewoLAB is our forum for these kinds of projects. Up until now we've worked with product designers and architects; this is our first time collaborating with an artist. This project is an especially good example of us putting our expectations aside, taking things step by step, learning, and growing.

We can't control, or guide, everything. It's a risk, but that's the nature of the beast. Failure is an option, since even that can help the company grow.