

# Art Against The Covid-19 Pandemic

## Kovid-19 Pandemisine Karşı Sanat

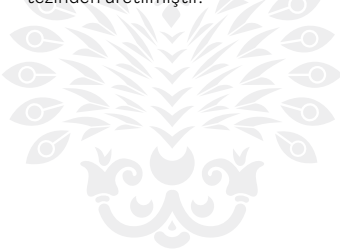
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### ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 virus, which first emerged in Wuhan, China in December 2019, gradually spread to all societies. As the virus, declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization, threatened human lives, governments' "stay at home" calls as a precautionary measure led to people's disconnection from the outside world and a transformation of daily life. During the pandemic period, where interpersonal contact and interaction were minimized, and intense emotional loss and isolation were experienced, the need for human socialization was met through virtual reality technologies and mobile applications, increasing interest in digital platforms. The integration of home-based art participation into human life and the hybrid model of socially distanced engagement in art also began during this process. With this model, in line with the dynamics of their environments, museums moved their doors online, galleries transferred their exhibitions, artists shifted their workshops and talks, and musicians relocated their concerts to virtual spaces. During the pandemic, when virtual networks saw intense circulation, artists carried out numerous initiatives under themes such as "Corona Diaries," "Corona Paintings," "Masks," and "Confrontation." During this period, social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter also activated artist talks, mini-concerts, workshop visits, and exhibitions. Many national and international museums opened their archives to access via digital resources. Through digital platforms, participants and audiences were integrated into a synthetic world, becoming part of automated virtual environments and virtual reality, down to the hardware used (e.g., CAVE). The tangible aspect of art gave way to simulated images reflected on screens. This research is an analysis of how societies engaged with art during the COVID-19 pandemic, experienced as a global crisis in the 21st century, how cultural and artistic environments were affected, and how artists, art audiences, and art consumers contended with the series of challenges brought by the pandemic. The study employs descriptive analysis, one of the qualitative research methods. Case studies were conducted to examine both the subject itself and its connections, and a theoretical framework was established.

**Keywords:** Art, Covid-19, epidemic, pandemic, culture and art during Covid-19

### ÖZ

2019 Aralık ayının başında, Çin'in Wuhan kentinde patlak veren Kovid -19 virüsü, zamanla tüm toplumlara sirayet etmiştir. Dünya Sağlık Örgütü'nün küresel salgın olarak tanımladığı Kovid -19 virüsünün insan hayatını tehdit etmesi neticesinde siyasi iktidarın önlem amaçlı insanlara "evde kal" çağrısı, insanların dış dünyadan bağının kesilmesine, yaşamın kabuk değiştirmesine sebep olmuştur. İnsanlar arası temasın ve etkileşimin en aza indirildiği, yoğun duygu kaybı ve yalnızlaşmanın yaşandığı pandemi günlerinde, insana dair sosyalleşmeye duyulan ihtiyaç, sanal gerçeklik teknolojileri ve mobil uygulamalarla giderilmiş, dijital mecralara olan ilgi artmıştır. Ev tabanlı sanat katılımının insan yaşamına eklenmesi ve sanatta sosyal mesafeli katılımın hibritleşme modeli yine bu süreçte başlamıştır. Bu modelle yaşanan ortamın dinamiklerine uygun olarak müzeler kapılarını, galeriler sergilerini, sanatçılar atölye ve söyleşilerini, müzisyenler konserlerini sanal ortamlara taşımıştır. Sanal ağların yoğun dolaşıma girdiği pandemi günlerinde, sanatçılar: "Korona Günlükleri, Korona Resimleri, Maske, Yüzleşme" konuları altında birçok inisiyatif gerçekleştirmiştir. Yine bu süreçte Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter gibi sosyal medya kaynaklarında sanatçı söyleşileri, mini konserler, atölye ziyaretleri, sergiler aktive edilmiştir. Ulusal ve uluslararası birçok müze, arşivlerini dijital kaynaklar üzerinden erişime açmıştır. Dijital mecralarla katılımcı ve izleyiciler, sentetik bir dünyaya dahil edilmiş, sanat eserinden kullanılan donanıma kadar (CAVE) otomatik sanal ortamların ve sanal gerçekliğin bir parçası durumuna gelmiştir. Sanatın gerçek yönü yerini artık, ekrana yansıyan simüle görüntülere bırakmıştır. Bu araştırma, 21. Yüzyılda küresel bir salgın olarak yaşanan Kovid-19 pandemisine karşı toplumların sanatla nasıl ilişkilendiği, kültür ve sanat ortamlarının nasıl etkilendiği, sanatçılar, sanat izleyicileri ve sanat tüketicilerinin Kovid-19 pandemisinin getirdiği bir dizi zorluklara karşı nasıl mücadele verdiğinin bir analizidir. Araştırmada nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden betimsel analize yer verilmiştir. İncelenen konunun hem kendisi hem de bağlantılarını belirlemek için örnek olay incelemeleri yapılmış ve kuramsal çerçevesi çizilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sanat, Kovid-19, salgın, pandemi, Kovid-19'da kültür-sanat



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## Introduction

Throughout history, epidemics have significantly affected societies not only as medical phenomena but also socially, politically, and morally. In art, literature, and philosophy, the theme of the epidemic has often been used to express humanity's fragility, collective fears, or systemic collapses. Albert Camus's work *The Plague* serves as a mirror reflecting people's fears, moral dilemmas in the face of death, solidarity, and hope, representing "social decay," while also becoming an important symbol of resistance against the epidemic (Camus, 2020).

The Covid-19 virus, which became the common nightmare of all humanity in the 21st century, emerged in Wuhan, China, and spread worldwide, causing a major pandemic. Due to the potential devastation the chaotic situation created by the Covid-19 virus, declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization, could inflict on public and cultural life, many countries decided to implement lockdown measures. These decisions led to the closure of all institutions and organizations, from curfews to travel bans, effectively bringing life to a standstill. The Covid-19 pandemic, which demographically affected all countries, impacted art environments politically, economically, technologically, and culturally, as it did many other fields. The restrictions imposed on human life due to the pandemic affected every area of life, from production to shopping, education to social activities. With travel restrictions, all international or national art organizations (art fairs, film festivals, art biennials - Riga International Contemporary Art Biennial, Frieze New York Biennial, Venice Architecture Biennale, Sydney Biennale, Fusebox, and Singapore Biennale - performance arts, exhibitions, concerts) were either canceled or postponed to a later date. During this period, TV channels halted series productions, and television and radio channels paused programs with multiple guests/audiences. The closure of art and cultural venues had devastating consequences for the lives of artists, musicians, architects, curators, and gallerists, as well as countless industries. Furthermore, many people working in these sectors were significantly affected by job or income loss and home-based employment. During this process where social life moved into homes due to the pandemic's impact, the more intense penetration of digital resources into human life expanded the boundaries of the cultural and artistic field and transformed the ways individuals engage with art. Home-based art participation and the hybrid model of socially distanced participation in art also began during this process. Adapting to the dynamics of the lived environment, museums moved their doors online, galleries their exhibitions, artists their workshops and talks, and musicians their concerts to virtual platforms. During the pandemic days when virtual networks were in intense circulation, artists initiated many initiatives under topics such as "Corona Diaries, Corona Paintings, Masks, Confrontation." During this process, artist talks, mini-concerts, studio visits, and exhibitions were activated on social media sources like Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. Many national and international museums opened their archives for access through digital resources. The real aspect of art gave way to simulated images reflected on the screen. In this respect, art environments entered a new interaction process with their audience, allowing for the use of a different expression method in the hybrid space between the artist, the work, and the audience, called "distanced participation in art." As J. Berger mentioned in an essay, "Trying to depict what exists today is an act of resistance that fosters hope" (Berger, 2023, p. 25). This statement seems to herald the pandemic days when human contact and interaction were minimized, and intense emotional loss and loneliness were experienced. During the lockdown days, the need for human socialization was met through virtual reality technologies and mobile applications. This research is an analysis of how societies related to art against the Covid-19 pandemic experienced as a global epidemic in the 21st century, how

cultural-art environments were affected, and how artists and art audiences struggled against a series of challenges brought by the Covid-19 pandemic. In the research; descriptive analysis, one of the qualitative data analysis methods, was used, and a case study was conducted. Since the topic is current, electronic sources, publications, and literature reviews were primarily utilized.

### Art During the Covid-19 Days

The metaphor of the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" found in the Book of Revelation symbolizes the four universal evils that have threatened humanity throughout history: "war, famine, death, and plague" (Lindemann, 2011, p. 72). Epidemics are waves of disease that affect societies suddenly and destructively; over time, they may completely disappear, lose their effect, or become endemic, embedding themselves into the pathological fabric of society (Amundsen and Ferngren, 2016, pp. 736-739). The term pandemic, derived from the combination of the Greek words "pan" (all) and "demos" (people), is used to describe disease outbreaks that affect the entire world or multiple continents (Shan, 2020, p. 18). Like all pandemics, Covid-19 is not a random event. Epidemics affect societies through the unique vulnerabilities created by the relationships humans establish with the environment, other species, and each other (Snowden, 2021, p. 15). The Covid-19 pandemic that emerged in 2019, fitting this definition, deeply shook demographic, economic, and social structures on a global scale; forcing many countries to decide on precautionary lockdowns. However, this bleak picture also revealed humanity's capacity to resist and unite through art. During the lockdown period, home-based art production and consumption not only served as an individual escape route but also transformed into a collective solidarity practice. Indeed, in Italy, one of the countries hardest hit by the pandemic, people singing songs to their neighbors from their balconies and these moments turning into a global sharing network on social media is a striking proof of how art can function as a lifeline in times of crisis. These spontaneous performances showed that art possesses a power beyond being merely an aesthetic phenomenon, one that repairs social bonds and creates a common language about the human condition.

#### Image 1.

*People Singing from Balcony to Balcony in Quarantine, Italy*



Another striking example is the "Music for Hope" performance by the famous Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli on April 12, 2020, alone in the historic Duomo Cathedral in Milan, which had become one of the symbolic centers of the pandemic. This impressive concert was live-streamed on YouTube, reaching over 2.8 million viewers simultaneously, becoming one of the most massive moments of artistic solidarity in the digital age (<https://umusic.ie/music-news/andrea-bocelli-music-for-hope>). In an atmosphere of great uncertainty and fear, Bocelli's voice echoing under the cathedral's massive dome served as a manifesto of artistic resistance that instilled hope in the entire world. This performance embodied

the transformative power of art in times of crisis, practically materializing Arthur C. Danto's argument from his work "What Art Is": "There is really nothing better than art for revitalizing the soul" (Danto, 2024, p. 16). Indeed, Ernst Fischer also emphasized in his book "The Necessity of Art" that art is a reflection of the historical conditions in which it is produced and has the capacity to represent the thoughts, longings, and hopes of an era (Fischer, 2018, p. 27). Bocelli's concert, in this very context, became an artistic document that eternalized the global anxieties and hopes of 2020, defying time. As Fischer also points out, this necessity of art is directly linked to its function of revitalizing and repairing the collective soul even in humanity's darkest moments.

#### Image 2.

Andrea Bocelli, *Duomo Cathedral*



Art has always served as an important tool for societies and cultures to reach into the future. This cultural continuity has been interrupted from time to time by events such as epidemic diseases, wars, etc., in different periods of history, as it is today. During such periods of disrupted welfare, the vital priorities of all units of society, from the largest to the smallest, underwent dramatic changes. Therefore, art was one of the first areas to feel the effects of this change, both materially and spiritually. Considering the importance of continuity in art and culture, the cancellation or postponement of cultural/art events due to the restrictions brought by the pandemic caused a chain reaction, dramatically affecting artists, collectors, gallerists, and consequently, employees serving in this sector. Although the closure of galleries and museums institutionally and the inability of the artist to meet their audience initially created a paralyzing effect, over time, virtual museums, virtual galleries, virtual performances, and art exhibitions reached their audience through online platforms. Moreover, the continuation of all institutions or individual promotional organizations on digital platforms is a natural result of the need for a new economic structuring.

In his book *Art Worlds*, Becker treated art as a collective action; he stated that the role of non-artist actors such as gallerists, art dealers, and critics in art management is a fundamental element of artwork design. Furthermore, Becker "emphasized the cooperative network consisting of sellers, performers, critics, and consumers as much as the producers who create the artwork as a collective division of labor" (Becker, 2013, pp. 46-48). Undoubtedly, this division of labor and integration was disrupted with the Covid-19 pandemic. Although artists tried to continue their creative processes in limited environments with limited materials, the production fields of artists practicing in fields such as painting, sculpture, land art, cinema, and theater weakened. However, this process provided a more comfortable working opportunity for artists who practice on digital platforms with new technologies. The instrumental range possessed by artists who create images using digital technologies has expanded day by day with new technologies (Yücel, 2012, p. 33). With these developments, artists gained a different acquisition not only in their working meth-

ods but also in their conceptual and aesthetic approaches. The effects of visual technologies have undoubtedly been significant in art media where different disciplines and combinations are used together. While new technologies offer artists multidisciplinary digital practices (NFT, metaverse, artificial intelligence, crypto art, render art, etc.), they have also given rise to hybrid media in the contemporary art field.

#### Image 3.

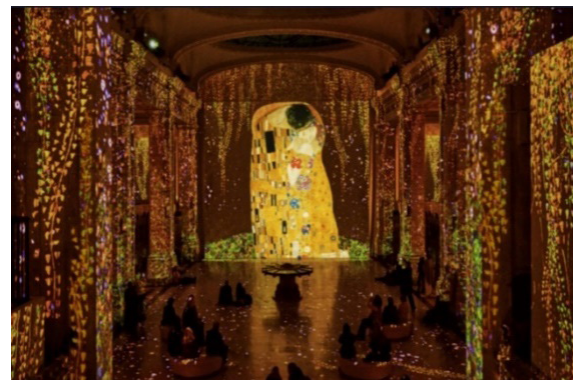
Refik Anadol, *Machine Hallucinatin: Renaissance Dreams, Florence, 2022*



Refik Anadol's practice "Machine Hallucination: Renaissance Dreams" reveals that computer technologies are not only a means of expression for the artist but also offer a comprehensive range that expands the artist's philosophical approach. The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the use of contemporary technologies such as virtual reality (VR) systems, providing new creative expression possibilities to the art field. Digital methods, long used in artist practices and exhibition spaces, gained importance with the pandemic, contributing to the proliferation, diversification, circulation, and sustainability of exhibition spaces. Furthermore, these methods have assumed an effective carrier role in accessing collector networks and in advertising and public relations strategies. Although art critics criticize the digital media where art is rapidly evolving, new and current applications have brought dynamism to the art field. Charles Baudelaire's expression in his works *Les Fleurs du mal* (The Flowers of Evil) and *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (The Painter of Modern Life) – "to extract the eternal from the transient and to produce correct and consistent works suitable for the production forms of the time" (Baudelaire, 2019, pp. 131-135) – can be considered an important proposition defining contemporary art practice today.

#### Image 4.

Gustav Klimt "Gold in Motion", Hales Lumières Digital Art Center, NewYork

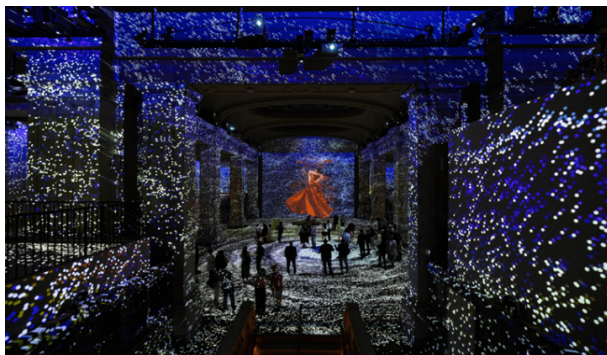




During the isolated days of intense home-based art participation, through digital media: participants and viewers were included in a synthetic world, becoming part of automatic virtual environments and virtual reality, from the artwork to the hardware used (CAVE). With these developments, people's ways of life also changed during the pandemic days when art gained momentum with new technologies. Cinemas brought home with 3D programs, museums visited from your seat, and concerts attended as spectators heralded the change in human life. Furthermore, the ongoing process gave people the responsibility to comprehend life and the flow of history while simultaneously preparing them for the adaptation process. The lifestyle brought by the pandemic in the globalized world allowed for the growth of the techno-economy. The transfer of exhibitions to virtual reality environments and the integration of digital methods into classical curatorial arrangements provided the audience with a new experience in these environments and created a significant alternative to the existing order. The formation of an exhibition-based phenomenon open to everyone's participation challenged the originality of the work, while at the same time, the effect of circulation and proliferation questioned the paradigm turning into the fading of the work and the loss of aura. The circulation of the work in the virtual environment may have created high dynamism in the perspective of the art buyer, follower, or intellectual. However, virtual exhibitions, which reduce the "here and now" of the work to an artificial experience, have deprived their audience of the opportunities to touch, smell, interact with the work, and integrate with the space through augmented reality applications, condemning them to the boundaries of the virtual experiences they created. Because physical spaces are not abstract or neutral; space itself is an artwork and simultaneously a living area (Groys, 2022, p. 87-88). Therefore, considering all these criteria, a new curatorial understanding and a new aesthetic perspective became necessary for the healthy progress of art tours and online exhibitions in rapidly digitizing virtual environments.

#### Image 5.

*Nohlab, 5 Movements, Halldes Lumières*



The methods of exhibiting an artwork are as important as its production, both disciplinarily and in terms of the relationship between the space and the work. Enclosed spaces (museums and galleries), although they confine art to a limited environment, are of great importance for the visibility of artists and their practices. Besides the pleasure provided by the physical atmosphere, disadvantages are also possible. Restrictions on the number of works due to the autonomy of spaces, the inability of new generation artists to find a place in these sectors, and the monopolization of the markets that govern art are some of these disadvantages. According to Schuberg, the British Museum, established in 1759, is seen as the world's oldest independent museum, but he suggests that this space was not initially a place where artworks were exhibited but was a semi-public collection for the public. He argues that in the early times, the British Museum was accepted only as a domain for educated nobles, and for most of the 19th

century, strict restrictions were applied on the number of visitors, opening to daily public visits only in 1879. Museums that discipline time and space with exhibition techniques and impose control over the audience, much like the art-power strategies based on the panopticon discussed in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, which deals with "surveillance-discipline mechanisms," guide the functioning of these institutions (Foucault, 2019, pp. 289-296). In *The Love of Art (L'amour de l'art)*, a sociological research classic on museum operation by Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel from 1966, they argue that museums, rather than equalizing social differences, are where social inequality is consolidated and legitimized (Bourdieu, 2022, pp. 223-230). Bourdieu also describes museums as a school that, through their highly disciplined judgments, transforms cultural differences dependent on social conditions into inequalities of talent. He suggests that the museum reinforces the existence of invisible walls between those competent and those not competent to consume art, strengthening feelings of belonging in some people and exclusion in others (Yücel, 2012, pp. 10-12). However, the need for space to exhibit art, although it limits art or excludes certain segments, is a fundamental way for artists to ensure their visibility, meet with the authorities of the art world, or be part of art history. For the democratization of art, there is always a need for both the virtual environment and physical environments governed by the masses and authorities. In this sense, moving art from the monopoly or domination of certain individuals to autonomous environments must be considered multi-dimensionally, and cultural and art policies need to be re-evaluated. Furthermore, all the mental faculties and power that artists have lost in managing their art, their art life, and their future have largely concentrated in the hands of major authorities and curators. These are a group of elitists and autocrats who manage the culture industry

#### Image 6.

*Masked image of Leonardo Da Vinci's 1503-1517 Mona Lisa painting*



The increased circulation of art through digital media with the pandemic relatively removed all restrictions and paved the way for the democratization of art. Artists gained a relatively freer environment, and with online applications, art transitioned into a dimension without space and time. However, these developments also paved the way for the commodification of art, which is part of the culture industry, and gave rise to excess. As Theodor W. Adorno noted, just as the artwork turns into a commodity and is received as such, in consumer society, the commodity itself has also turned into image, representation, and spectacle. Packaging and promotion have replaced use value. The end of the commodification of art is the aestheticization of the commodity. The seductive, deadly song of the commodity has displaced the promise of happiness once contained in bourgeois art; the consumer Odysseus, hoping to reach satisfaction, would joyfully throw himself into the waters of the commodity sea but would not find what he was looking for (Adorno, 2021, p. 38).

**Image 7.**

Louvre Museum, 2020



Although some believe that accessing art in the digital environment does not reflect its real value, many people follow online exhibitions and artist talks with great interest. Indeed, globally, all people are trying to sustain their lives in some way and not stay away from their interests. Undoubtedly, there are significant differences between watching a theater play or concert from home and experiencing an exhibition online. Although it does not replace experiencing a live performance concretely with the senses, participating in contemporary art via computer or mobile applications is relatively important under these conditions. Especially, watching practices produced in new media, photography, video, and digital art disciplines on social content platforms globally has changed the follow-up processes. The transfer of many galleries' and museums' shows to online platforms also serves a suspension function in these changing habits. Institutions that can keep up with the times with new technologies and mobile applications that rapidly integrated into human life (museums, galleries, art houses, art associations, etc.) have had the opportunity to strengthen their existence even more with these transformations.

**Image 8.**

Lütfi Özkök, Portraits, Istanbul Modern, Virtual Tour Exhibition, 2020

**Image 9.**

Frida Kahlo, Girl with a Pearl Earring, Mona Lisa at Home

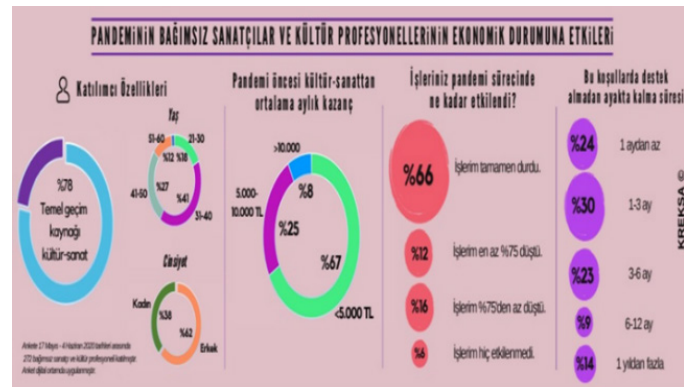


## The Effects of Covid-19 on the Culture-Art Economy

The Covid-19 pandemic, which caught humanity unprepared, entered our lives at a time when the destruction of natural life and the world's ecosystem and the deepening structural crisis of capitalism continued. The unpreparedness of societies, healthcare systems, and cultural sectors for this situation caused existing class inequalities to deepen further. Illness and deaths particularly hit the poor, the unemployed, precarious workers, refugees, laborers, and independently working artists – in short, the disadvantaged segments of society (Tanık, 2021, p. 151). From the very beginning of the process, the culture and art sector in our country, as in all countries, was severely affected by this situation. According to the report by the Culture and Art Research Association (KREKSA), in 2017, 15,394 enterprises operating in cultural sectors provided employment for 52,080 people while reaching a total turnover of 14 billion 600 million TL and added value of 3 billion 600 million TL (<https://www.tusev.org.tr>).

**Image 10.**

Kreksa Report



Following the detection of the first Covid-19 case in Turkey, a circular published by the Ministry of Interior temporarily halted the activities of 149,382 workplaces across the country between March 15-18, 2020, including 95 theaters, 444 cinemas, 109 performance centers, and 62 concert halls (<https://www.icisleri.gov.tr>). The culture and art sector, whose activities were temporarily halted, gradually resumed its activities starting from July 1, 2020, in accordance with the circular published by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism on June 23, 2020. However, the government's initiation of a normalization process starting in June to stop the economic crises experienced in all sectors did not apply to the culture and art sector. Undoubtedly, the artists were the most affected by the crisis in the art and culture field and suffered income loss (<https://artdogistanbul.com>). Furthermore, the 2020 data reflected in the cultural economy and cultural employment statistics prepared within the scope of the Turkish Statistical Institute's (TÜİK) Household Labor Force Survey showed that cultural employment decreased by 6.2% compared to 2019. These statistics show that approximately 40 thousand people working in the culture and art sector became unemployed during the pandemic process. However, researchers in this field suggest that since some of those working in the culture and art sector work uninsured and their records are not kept, this data might be misleading, and the number of those who lost their jobs is actually much higher (<https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-59682586>).



**Image 11.**

*Americans For The Arts, The Impact of Covid-19 on Art 2020-2022*



The “Impact of Covid-19 on Artists and Creative Sector Workers Survey” prepared by Americans For The Arts, a non-profit organization supporting art in the USA, aimed to highlight the needs and encountered obstacles of workers and artists in the creative sectors during the pandemic process. According to the results of this survey, answered by over 11,000 artists in the US; 62% of artists became unemployed, and 95% suffered significant income loss. Another important issue from the survey was that 66% of artists were unable to access materials and resources for their production during this process (<https://artdogistanbul.com>). In his research report titled “The impact of the pandemic on art” on May 12, 2022, Cohen Randy stated that the covid-19 epidemic had a devastating effect on America’s art sector, that the employment conditions of artists and creative workers began to improve, and that art sectors recovered more slowly than other sectors. However, he also stated that the destruction of the covid-19 pandemic in physical environments continues (<https://www.americansforthearts.org/>). According to the Americans for the Arts report, the damage seen by the culture-art sector is quite high. In an article published on 05/18/2020, while the loss of the non-profit art-culture sector was 5.5 million, the loss of local businesses also resulted in 6.7 billion dollars. During the pandemic process, 95% of events were canceled, and it was argued that there was a 30% decrease in the artistic workforce in the non-profit art and culture sector (<https://www.americansforthearts.org/>).

The Covid-19 pandemic has taken its place in history as a multi-layered crisis that deepened existing socio-economic inequalities on a global scale and structurally transformed the culture-art ecosystem. This process, on the one hand, revealed the vital importance of art as a tool for social resilience and solidarity, while on the other hand, it exposed the systematic fragility faced by artists and cultural workers in all its starkness. Data ranging from Turkey to the United States objectively reflect the scale of employment losses, income decreases, and institutional damages in the culture-art sector. Indeed, data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) recorded a 6.2% decrease in cultural employment; reports from Americans for the Arts documented that 95% of artists in the US suffered significant income loss. However, this bleak picture also contains the potential for the sector to rebuild itself through digital transformation, alternative production models, and social solidarity networks. In the post-pandemic period, cultural-art policies must place at their center building an ecosystem that secures the socio-economic rights of artists, protects vulnerable groups, and is more resilient to crises. For art is not merely a manifestation of prosperous times but a guide that does not lose its light even in humanity’s darkest moments.

### **The Image of Art and Art Auctions in the Covid-19 Pandemic**

The global pandemic created both a deep crisis and a transformation in the art world. The image of art and auction dynamics un-

derwent significant changes during this process. With the global pandemic, a series of changes were made in state policies under the motto of “the healing and unifying power of art.” States and institutions promoted art as a “therapeutic tool”; this situation led to the rediscovery of art’s social unifying and therapeutic function. The primary tool of state power in the art and culture world is public art institutions: institutions like the British Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts in the USA have been called “cultural guardians” (Wu, 2019, p. 37). The links between art and power and the various economies that sustain the art market are related to modern art auctions where, according to Baudrillard, money buys not only art but also prestige (Baudrillard, 2022, p. 203). In art auctions, the object itself gains value as a sign; spending is not only a sacrifice but also part of the competition among wealthy art buyers (Leppert, 2017, p. 34). Within this competition, art has transformed into many images: from being shaped under the patronage of a certain segment and submitting to their desires, to the sovereignty of theological schools, from the struggle to be original to consumption for entertainment. According to Lacan, art belongs not to the real order but to the symbolic order (Perniola, 2022, p. 23).

With the pandemic, art institutions, collectors, dealers, and some museums opened their art archives to auctions following the restrictions. Sales realized for very high amounts once again showed that the commodification of the work as a measure of value and material gain were prioritized over aesthetic-creativity assessments.

**Image 12.**

*Sotheby's*

**Image 13.**

*Francis Bacon, Triptych Inspired by the Oresteia of Aeschylus, 1981 Sotheby's auction*



With the pandemic, major auction houses like Christie's and Sotheby's moved their physical events to digital platforms. This increased global participation and democratized auctioneering to some extent. For example, in an online auction held by Sotheby's auction house in June 2020, Francis Bacon's 1981 painting "Triptych Inspired by the Oresteia of Aeschylus" sold for \$84.5 million. At the Poly Auction House in Beijing, Wu Bin's 1610 work "Ten Views of a Lingbi Rock" sold for \$76.6 million, and Mark Rothko's 1967 painting "Untitled" found a buyer for \$31.3 million at Christie's Auction House's New York branch during the "20th Century Sale" (<https://artdogistanbul.com/2020nin--enleri-muzayedelerde-satilan-en-pahali-10-sanat-eseri>). Terry Eagleton, in "The Ideal of Culture," expressed the auctioning of art with this statement: "Art has entered a deathly compromise with a society that it only excites in the auction room. The abstract logic peculiar to this society strips the world of its sensuousness. Art has also been contaminated by a social order in which truth is useless and value means selling" (Artun, 2012, p. 168). Historically, art has always tried to sustain its existence under the monopoly of certain policies. Art authorities, targeting autonomous organizations and multinational large capital groups within the scope of art projects, have turned art into a commodity. "Commodified art" in the culture industry has become an element of entertainment for those holding economic power. As art became a kind of production and financial tool in this process and creativity became industrialized, these two elements undoubtedly created a new "image" by entering the "cultural economy." The cultural economy has ultimately permeated the market, which is a kind of spirit of neoliberal revolutions. The art market aimed to be formed has pioneered the establishment of new people and a new world rather than being designed, directed, and managed. Therefore, for the market to establish its cultural hegemony and permeate life, art must be mobilized. For this, just as knowledge is transformed into information, art is first reduced to a communication language, a "meaning machine" (Artun, 2018, p. 46).

#### Image 14.

Pablo Picasso, *L'Etreinte* 1969, May, Modern Evening Auction Sotheby's (New York)

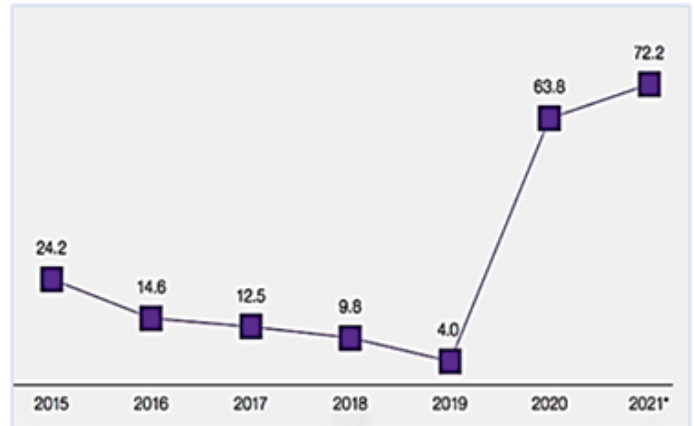


In a report published in 2021 by London-based art market analysis company Pi-eX, it was announced that Christie's, Sotheby's, and Phillips auction houses saw a 405% increase in sales in April and June compared to the previous year. In an interview with Bloomberg Markets, Christie's CEO Guillaume Cerutti stated that there was strong demand for sales related to artworks at auction houses during the 2020 pandemic; however, collectors were more cautious and reluctant to sell works due to the uncertainties

brought by economic conditions. Cerutti expressed that art dealers were in the process of turning this stagnation in the art market into an opportunity (<https://www.artnews.com/art-news/market/auction-sales-rebound-second-quarter-2021-1234599862/>).

#### Image 15.

Pi-eX statistics



The acceleration of digitalization with the pandemic also transformed trade models in the art market. It accelerated the active follow-up of current applications such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and Twitter, as well as crypto art and metaverse. According to the Art Basel and UBS report titled "The Art Market 2022," this situation affected many collectors, especially the younger generations Y and Z, more (<https://artdogistanbul.com/>). Although the motivations of these new collectors differ, the 2022 Hiscox Online Art Trade Report shows that 74% of those under 35 purchased artworks and other collection products to support the art community. Furthermore, young generation NFT collectors, expanding their art archives, created a global market of \$2.4 billion in the art market. New shopping methods such as online auctions, a yield of the pandemic and lockdown, and the possibility of payment with cryptocurrency have been a fundamental factor in young curators and technology-savvy investors investing in NFTs (<https://www.artnews.com>).

#### Image 16.

Hale Tenger, *How Did We Get Here*, 2016

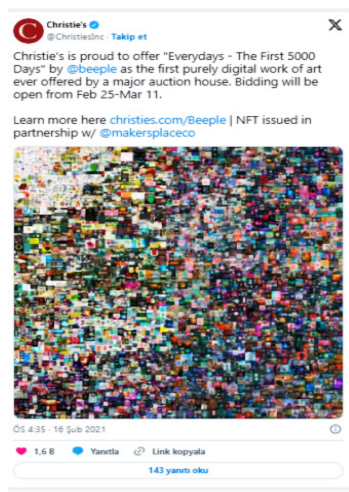


According to Dapp Industry's report, Beeple's NFT put up for auction at Christie's Auction House sold for \$69.3 million. With Beeple's record sale, the NFT market formed an important center in the art market in 2021, and a serious transformation occurred in the art world (<https://artdogistanbul.com/>). Alex de Waal, in his article "Thinking in a Pandemic," argues that "every pandemic is a game played between knowledge, ideology, and politics" (Weal, 2020). From this perspective, it is possible to read Beeple's record sale as part of this 'game'.



**Image 17.**

Beeple (Mike Winkelmann), *The First 5000 Days, Crypto Work (NFT)*



Purchasing a million-dollar artwork in a digital auction granted the buyer instant symbolic capital. This action contained a message like “I support art even during the pandemic” or “I was not affected by the crisis.” Here, economic capital was directly converted into symbolic capital. It was hidden behind the illusion of “love of culture,” described by Bourdieu and Darbel for museums, the illusion of “investing in auctions” (Bourdieu and Darbel, 2019, pp. 112-115). However, this symbolic capital cycle cannot be considered separately from the overall economic growth in the art market. Indeed, the 2022 report titled “Global Art Market” by UBS Investor Watch and Arts Economics extensively examined buyer behaviors and income trends in the global art market; this comprehensive study conducted with collectors, gallery managers, and auction house representatives revealed that the market gained significant strength in 2021 with an estimated sales volume of \$65.1 billion. A 29% growth was recorded compared to the previous year, the market exceeded its 2019 volume by \$0.7 billion, and a 50% increase occurred in the French art market. The same report emphasizes that interest in NFTs will continue in 2022 as it did in 2021, that 74% of art market actors purchased NFTs in 2021, and that the total sales value of art-themed NFTs on the Ethereum, Flow, and Ronin blockchains reached \$2.6 billion with a more than 100-fold increase. While it is stated that 88% of high net worth (HNW) collectors, who typically have at least \$1 million in liquid assets, are inclined to purchase NFT-based artworks in 2022 and beyond; a small minority (4%) expressed no interest in NFT-based works. Although a significant increase was observed in artwork purchases from online platforms in the last two years, 69% of collectors stated that they prefer to examine works physically. Despite the digitization of the art market and the rise of digital auction platforms in the 2019-2022 period, only 19% of art buyers stated they prefer online platforms, and 12% stated they use both physical and online channels together (<https://www.ogusto.com/sanat/2022-yili-global-sanat-pazari>). These data prove that even during crisis periods, collectors in the high-income group can preserve their economic capital and even increase their strategies to convert it into symbolic and cultural capital. Therefore, far from reducing inequalities in the art market, the pandemic has reinforced the power of those with economic capital and deepened the gap between them and other segments. The fact that the art market grew by 29% in 2021 compared to the previous year and reached a volume of \$65.1 billion is a clear indicator of this situation. The transformation of the art market in the pandemic process has been a multi-layered process where digitalization accelerated, new buyer profiles emerged, and existing inequalities deepened. This period has shown that art is not

only an aesthetic field but also a strategic investment tool and a mechanism for converting economic capital into symbolic capital. Therefore, the future of the art market will be shaped by the interaction of digital transformation and traditional dynamics, as well as the balance between democratization and deepening inequalities.

## Conclusion

Art has always served as a vital instrument for societies and cultures to project themselves into the future. The Covid-19 pandemic has taken its place in history as a multidimensional crisis that profoundly tested art's function of carrying social memory forward and its cultural continuity. This process not only challenged art's role in preserving societal memory and ensuring cultural continuity but also marked a turning point that presented significant opportunities and threats for the structural transformation of the art ecosystem. As with past pandemics and war periods, this crisis reshaped the vital priorities of all layers of society; it strained artists, curators, gallerists, collectors, and sector workers both materially and spiritually, making art one of the first fields to feel the effects of the crisis. The 6.2% decrease in cultural employment in Turkey and 95% of artists in the USA experiencing income loss are concrete indicators of this situation. Although the closure of galleries and museums on an institutional level and the inability of artists to meet their audience initially created a paralyzing effect, this forced disconnection also served as a historic catalyst for digital transformation. While virtual museums, online exhibitions, digital performances, and NFT markets created alternative channels for the sustainability of art, conditions of quarantine and isolation transformed the ways art is exhibited, experienced, and received, rather than how it is produced. However, this digitization process, born out of necessity, while paving the way for the democratization and de-spatialization of art, also brought with it risks of commodification and speculation. As a result of the restrictions imposed on social life during the pandemic days, the hybrid model of socially distanced participation in art became integrated into human life through home-based art engagement. This process, which evolved from a state of necessity, changed how people relate to art. Digital methods, long used in artistic practices and exhibition spaces, gained prominence with the pandemic, enabling the proliferation, diversification, circulation, and sustainability of exhibition spaces in virtual environments. Artists, who were the most affected by the crisis in the art and culture field and suffered income loss, tried to continue their creative processes in limited environments with scarce materials. The production fields of artists practicing in various disciplines (painting, sculpture, land art, cinema, theater, etc.) particularly weakened. However, this process offered a more comfortable working opportunity for artists practicing on digital platforms with new technologies. The instrumental range possessed by artists who create imagery utilizing these digital technologies has expanded with new technologies. The digital mediums through which art is rapidly evolving have brought dynamism to the art field. The increased circulation of art through digital media with the pandemic relatively removed all restrictions, paving the way for the democratization and de-spatialization of art, while also introducing the risk of commodification. Artists have attained a relatively freer environment and have carried art into a dimension without space and time through online applications. In the post-pandemic period, it is essential to implement inclusive, fair, and multi-layered policies for the sustainability of the art ecosystem. The socio-economic rights of artists must be guaranteed, vulnerable groups must be protected, digital literacy must be widespread, and a balanced approach between digital and physical mediums must be adopted. At the same time, developing a critical perspective against the commodification process of art and redefining the social function of art are of great importance.



For art is not merely a manifestation of prosperous times but a light that guides and unites even in humanity's darkest hours. To prevent this light from extinguishing, a new cultural paradigm is needed—one where art is supported both as a tool of resistance and a language that repairs social bonds; where inequalities are reduced, pluralism is encouraged, and creative expression is liberated. Building this paradigm will be one of the most urgent and meaningful tasks facing the art world in the post-pandemic era.

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**Image 6.** Masked image of Leonardo Da Vinci's 1503-1517 Mona Lisa painting.

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**Image 7.** Louvre Museum, 2020

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**Image 10.** Kreksa Report

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## Yapılandırılmış Özet

2019 Aralık ayının başında, Çin'in Wuhan kentinde patlak veren Kovid -19 virüsü, zamanla tüm toplumlara sirayet etmiştir. Dünya Sağlık Örgütü'nün küresel salgın olarak tanımladığı Kovid -19 virüsünün insan hayatını tehdit etmesi neticesinde siyasi iktidarın önlem amaçlı insanlara "evde kal" çağrısı, insanların dış dünyadan bağının kesilmesine, yaşamın kabuk değiştirmesine sebep olmuştur. İnsanlar arası temasın ve etkileşimin en aza indirildiği, yoğun duygu kaybı ve yalnızlaşmanın yaşandığı pandemi günlerinde, insana dair sosyalleşmeye duyulan ihtiyaç, sanal gerçeklik teknolojileri ve mobil uygulamalarla giderilmiş, dijital mecralara olan ilgi artmıştır. Ev tabanlı sanat katılımının insan yaşamına eklenmesi ve sanatta sosyal mesafeli katılımın hibritleşme modeli yine bu süreçte başlamıştır. Bu modelle yaşanan ortamın dinamiklerine uygun olarak müzeler kapılarını, galeriler sergilerini, sanatçılar atölye ve söyleşilerini, müzisyenler konserlerini sanal ortamlara taşımıştır. Sanal ağların yoğun dolaşıma girdiği pandemi günlerinde, sanatçılar: "Korona Günlükleri, Korona Resimleri, Maske, Yüzleşme" konuları altında birçok inisiyatif gerçekleştirmiştir. Yine bu süreçte Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter gibi sosyal medya kaynaklarında sanatçı söyleşileri, mini konserler, atölye ziyaretleri, sergiler aktive edilmiştir. Ulusal ve uluslararası birçok müze, arşivlerini dijital kaynaklar üzerinden erişime açmıştır. Sanatın gerçek yönü yerini artık, ekrana yansıyan simüle görüntülere bırakmıştır. Bu yönüyle sanat ortamları izleyicisiyle yeni bir etkileşim sürecine girmiş, "sanatta mesafeli katılım" denilen sanatçı, eser ve izleyici arasındaki hibrit alanda farklı bir ifade yönteminin kullanılmasına olanak sağlamıştır. Sanatta ve kültürde sürekliliğin önemini göz önünde bulundurursak, pandemiyle gelen kısıtlamalar sonucunda kültür/sanat etkinliklerinin iptal edilmesi veya ertelenmesi, zincirleme olarak sanatçılar, koleksiyoncular ve galericilerin, buna bağlı olarak da bu sektörde hizmet veren çalışanların dramatik bir şekilde etkilenmesine neden olmuştur. Kurumsal anlamda galerilerin, müzelerin kapanması ve sanatçının- izleyicisiyle buluşamaması başlangıçta felç etkisi yaratsa da süreç içinde sanal müze, sanal galeri, sanal performans ve sanat sergileri online mecralar aracılığıyla izleyicine ulaşmıştır. Kovid-19 pandemisiyle birlikte sanat dünyasında ki görev dağılımı ve bütünleşme süreci sektöre uğramış, sanatçılar yaratım süreçlerini kısıtlı ortamlarda kısıtlı malzemelerle devam ettirmeye çalışmışlardır. Pandemi süreci dijital teknolojilerden yararlanarak görüntü yaratan sanatçıların sahip olduğu araçsal yelpazeyi, yeni teknolojilerle genişletmiştir. Bu gelişmeler ile sanatçılar, yalnızca çalışma yöntemlerinde değil, kavramsal ve estetik yaklaşımlarında da farklı bir kazanım sağlamışlardır. Farklı disiplinlerin ve kombinasyonların bir arada kullanıldığı sanat mecralarında, görsel teknolojilerin etkileri hiç kuşkusuz büyük olmuştur. Yeni teknolojiler sanatçılara çok disiplinli dijital pratikler (NFT, metaversa, yapay zekâ, kripto sanat, render art vb.) sunarken, diğer taraftan da çağdaş sanat alanında melez mecralar doğurmuştur. Uzun süredir sanatçı pratiklerinde ve sergileme alanlarında kullanılan dijital yöntemler, pandemiyle birlikte yükselerek sergileme alanlarının çoğalmasına, çeşitlenmesine, dolaşımına, sürdürülebilirliğine olanak sağlamıştır. Ayrıca koleksiyoner ağı edinimlerinde, reklam ve halkla ilişki yöntemlerinde de önemli ölçüde taşıyıcı olmuştur. Sanatın hızlı bir şekilde evrildiği dijital mecraları, sanat eleştirmenleri eleştiriyor olsa da yeni ve güncel uygulamalar sanat alanına dinamik kazandırmıştır. Ev tabanlı sanat katılımının yoğun yaşandığı izole günlerinde, dijital mecralarla: Katılımcı ve izleyiciler sentetik bir dünyaya dahil edilmiş, sanat eserinden kullanılan donanıma kadar (CAVE) otomatik sanal ortamların ve sanal gerçekliğin bir parçası durumuna gelmiştir. 3D programlarıyla eve taşınan sinemalar, oturduğu yerden gezilen müzeler ve seyircisi olunan konserler insan yaşamındaki değişimin habercisi olmuştur. Küreselleşen dünyada pandeminin getirdiği yaşam tarzı, tekno-ekonominin büyümesine imkân sağlamıştır. Sergilerin sanal gerçeklik ortamlarına taşınması, klasik küratöryel düzenlemelere dijital yöntemlerin eklenmesi izleyicinin bu ortamlarda yeni bir deneyim kazanmasını sağlamış ve var olan düzene önemli bir alternatif oluşturmuştur. Herkesin katılımına açık olan aşırı sergilemeye dayalı fenomenin oluşması eserin özgünlüğüne meydan okurken aynı zamanda dolaşımın ve çoğalmanın etkisi eserin solmasına auranın kaybına dönüşen paradigmayı da sorgulatmıştır. Eserin sanal ortamda dolaşımı; sanat alıcısı, takipçisi veya entelektüelinin bakış açısında yüksek bir devinim yaratmış olabilir. Ancak eserin "şimdi ve buradlığını" yapay bir deneyime indirgeyen sanal sergiler, arttırılmış gerçeklik uygulamaları ile izleyicisine esere dokunma, koklama, etkileşimde bulunma, mekanla bütünleşme olanaklarından mahrum bırakmış, kendi yarattığı sanal deneyimlerin sınırlarına mahkûm etmiştir. Çünkü fiziki mekanlar soyut ya da nötr değildir, mekânın kendisi bir sanat yapıtıdır ve aynı zamanda yaşam alanıdır. Dolayısıyla hızlı dijitalleşen sanal ortamlardaki sanat turlarının ve online sergilerin, sağlıklı bir zeminde ilerlemesi için, yeni küratör anlayışa ve yeni bir estetik bakışa ihtiyaç doğmuştur. Diğer bir açıdan ise pandemiyle birlikte sanatın dijital medya üzerinden daha fazla dolaşıma girmesi, bu sektörlerde yer bulamayan sanatçıların sergileme olanaklarını nispeten genişletmiş, sanatın demokratikleşmesine zemin hazırlamıştır. Sanatçılar görece olarak daha özgür bir ortama kavuşmuşlar ve online uygulamalar ile sanat, mekânsız ve zamansız bir boyuta geçmiştir. Ancak yaşanan bu gelişmeler de kültür endüstrisinin bir parçası olan sanatın metalaşmasına zemin hazırlamış ve aşırılığı doğurmuştur. Sanatın demokratikleşmesi için hem sanal ortama hem de kitlelerin ve otoritelerin yönettiği fiziki ortamlara her daim ihtiyaç duyulmaktadır.

Bu araştırma, 21. Yüzyılda küresel bir salgın olarak yaşanan Kovid-19 pandemisine karşı toplumların sanatla nasıl ilişkilendiği, kültür ve sanat ortamlarının nasıl etkilendiği, sanatçılar, sanat izleyicileri ve sanat tüketicilerinin Kovid-19 pandemisinin getirdiği bir dizi zorluklara karşı nasıl mücadele verdiğinin bir analizidir. Araştırmada nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden betimsel analize yer verilmiştir. İncelenen konunun hem kendisi hem de bağlantılarını belirlemek için örnek olay incelemeleri yapılmış ve kuramsal çerçevesi çizilmiştir.