Any artwork is subject to a web of assessments, expressed from the perspective of experts and audiences. Among those actors in this judgmental spectacle are curators, critics, art historians, philosophers, art dealers, and of course the public too. Institutions and the machinery of the art market complete this disposition.

Aside from the monetary evaluation of artworks and their unregulated market, the criteria for an artwork’s quality and its merit remain rather vague. Despite this fact the contemporary art world is persistently fixated on the “value” of art: wanting to recognize what is “new” and “original”, “relevant”, “challenging” or “radical”. Yet, is it possible to truly recognize what makes a work of art “outstanding” or “contemporary”, those qualities which are telling of their time while also carrying universal modes of understanding?

The whole is made from a not-quite-transparent set of determinants that are difficult to break down. As usual, it is much easier to reflect on the past, for a look back provides examples of views and ideologies that defined – perhaps in a rather simple way – values and “qualities” of artistic creations. This is how the development of the canon of art has reached a condition where, despite continual redefinition of change is tardy at best. Well, don’t we all like tunes we already know?

Since the arrival of the avant-garde movement art has taken a progressive and experimental position, one which breaks away from tradition and introduces new ideas that sometimes do not receive appreciation and understanding during the era of their creation. According to many of its critics, the socially engaged ideals of the early avant-garde slowly faded into an elitist project in which only a continuous chase of “new and radical” impulses remained. Other critics consider contemporary art to be little more than an exceptional asset, a neutralized commodity that refrains from institutional criticism or engagement with the politico-economic realities of our time.

Today, when the methods of branding, marketing and aura-creation are the prevailing means for valuation the good-old invisible hand of the economy, matching demand and supply, is at rest. The booming contemporary art market behaves similarly: without a set of market rules, it operates on the basis of an empathically fetishized commodity. Is art capable of escaping (and should it) a commodity fetishism that relies on the apparent autonomy of an artwork and its aura? How can we devise other strategies to value art?

Any artwork is subject to a web of value and value systems surrounding us. The contemporary art market is complete this process. The development of the canon of art to represent different notions of value in the contemporary. How can we counter the certain apathy of the contemporary to engage with positions that resist this mood and present us with challenging perspectives on value? The project attempts to locate artistic and institutional practices that offer viewpoints beyond the strategy of blending-in and conforming to the rules.

In the light of the above, an investigation into the sources of an artwork’s value, the values it may create and the value systems it is subject to is an arduous, if not simply naïve task – for all methods, theories and ideologies fail. It is impossible to lay out the basic arguments in a singular, clear and precise manner but it is possible to distinguish several attitudes within the practices of contemporary artists as being notable for their reflections on the difficult process of cultivating value in a work of art.

The Trouble with Value discusses the tangled story of the symbolic and economic value that a work of art holds, being a product of its maker’s labour; with an attempt to provide insights into current notions of value and value systems surrounding us.
The presented work shows the second outcome of the artist duo’s long-term data research into the global contemporary art world, its actors, and their relations. For more information and to follow the project’s development, visit www.invisiblematter.xyz

The landscapes in Monique Hendriksen’s work seem familiar, and at the same time subtly uncanny and artificial, as if arising from the future. In her practice Hendriksen seeks an aesthetic for our contemporary state of capitalist realism. Instead of creating new imagery she deploys visual materials in copyright-free sources, and are radically copyright-free. In doing so, she identifies with the way visual materials circulate as they become more and more acknowledged as artists, and gain value today, as the more something is seen the more it becomes important, and thus valuable.

Gerlach en Koop’s work originates from the by-now demolished building of Générale de Banque in Brussels (now part of BNP Paribas Fortis), 650 years old in the last remaining primeval forest in Europe. Black oak is an expensive and luxurious material, often called “the Polish ebony.” Its dark hue was created by soaking the tree in water for hundreds of years.

The landscapes in Hendriksen’s work seem familiar, and at the same time subtly uncanny and artificial, as if arising from the future. In her practice Hendriksen seeks an aesthetic for our contemporary state of capitalist realism. Instead of creating new imagery she deploys visual materials in copyright-free sources, and are radically copyright-free. In doing so, she identifies with the way visual materials circulate as they become more and more acknowledged as artists, and gain value today, as the more something is seen the more it becomes important, and thus valuable.

The landscapes in Hendriksen’s work seem familiar, and at the same time subtly uncanny and artificial, as if arising from the future. In her practice Hendriksen seeks an aesthetic for our contemporary state of capitalist realism. Instead of creating new imagery she deploys visual materials in copyright-free sources, and are radically copyright-free. In doing so, she identifies with the way visual materials circulate as they become more and more acknowledged as artists, and gain value today, as the more something is seen the more it becomes important, and thus valuable.