



The Creative's Curse: Youth and Fine Art in Ghana

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*"It's all of these wealthy white collectors who are making huge money off of African artists during Black Lives Matter. These people must not care about Black lives at all."*¹

Bennett Roberts, gallerist

Lemon nails
Annan Affotey

¹Artnet News. Available at: <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/amoako-boafo-1910883>



The problem connects to global Sustainable Development Goals 8 and 10.



More importantly, it also aligns with Africa-led proposals outlined in the **Pan-African Cultural Manifesto of 1969.**

Problem

Fine art represents a multi-billion-dollar industry, but also has significant cultural value in the way it contributes to global conversations on racial justice and offers imagination for a better future.

Since the killing of George Floyd, African art has seen an exponential rise in demand, and several high-profile Ghanaian artists have made international success stories. However, lack of data on the industry - and the embedded social and political environment in which it exists - clouds whether the booming industry will benefit Ghanaians or "middlemen" further down the value chain. Information asymmetry, social stigmas, power imbalances, and hands-off government policies suggest Ghanaian art may be at risk of falling prey to the type of exploitation synonymous with a resource curse.

Based on the authors' knowledge, news articles, and interviews, the rising industry and shifting power dynamics offer a chance for a reset. With a reset, youth in Ghana would have more opportunities to pursue art as a profession as well as fairer opportunities to succeed once inside the industry.

Proposals for Progress

Proposal 9: to take measures in order to stop the hemorrhaging of cultural goods that are disappearing from the African continent

Proposal 16: To get African women and young people more actively and massively involved in the conservation, transmission, and development of our cultural patrimony

Proposal 18: To stir up more sustained actions favoring African movements of national liberation in preparation for artistic, political, and ideological renewal

Proposal 26: To reestablish historical truth with the help of African artists and intellectuals. By spreading the word about the struggle for liberation within and outside the African continent, they will contribute to their societies



"The preservation of culture has saved African peoples from attempts to turn them into peoples without a soul and without a history. Culture preserved them. Evidently, they now want culture to help them find the way toward progress and development; indeed, culture defines personalities and links men together, but it also encourages progress."

-Pan-African Cultural Manifesto

Problem explored – barriers to *entry*

Artist-Centered Design Approach: We collected stories from individuals (anonymized) who were held back, by different circumstances, from pursuing art.

In high school, I wanted to take art classes, but my teachers told me that I was smart enough to pursue STEM subjects. My parents used to tell me that **art is a subject for dropouts and drug addicts**. I ended up going to university to pursue law and now I'm a lawyer in Accra.



KOFI

I always loved drawing. My parents wanted me to go into catering, but they let it go when they saw how good my paintings were. When I started going to art school, I saw there were no other girls but decided to keep going anyway. After graduation, I stopped painting because **I saw no movement in the industry**. I had children and saw that I was the one most suited to care for them. I've heard the industry is starting to move but I'm not sure if it's worth trying to paint again. I recently got a small amount of money from an artist friend who's moved abroad and wants me to return to my passion. We'll see how it goes...



AMA

Problem explored – barriers to *success*

Artist-Centered Design Approach: We collected stories from individuals (anonymized) who defied the system to pursue art.

I always enjoyed drawing, but my parents told me to go read a book. At school, **teachers would beat me for sketching** during class. Parents did not understand why they should pay for art materials and I was told **"art is for weak minds."** I was stubborn and pursue art at Ghanatta College of Art and Design. After I graduated, I taught art at the school for 17 years. My career as an artist has not been glamorous; I've been cheated by people who promised to sell art on my behalf.



KWABENA



KWAME

I was born into an artistic family and my mother's church group funded my fees to attend art school. I painted for 11 years and showed at hotels. I paid for an apprenticeship. Finally, I received my **"big break"** at one of Ghana's best galleries. However, I'm still unsure how much the works sold for, but the show was sold and **I'm still waiting for payment**. I was told that was not the standard operating procedure for artists based outside Ghana. My goal is to have my works in museums and to be remembered for what I have done.

I went to art school and won several awards. I moved to Europe where my paintings were bought by a famous artist. **A flipper sold one of my works** for \$800k. I once fell victim to a collector who did not honor our agreement and stole my work. I currently have a partnership with a top French designer and celebrity endorsement.



YAW

A History of Paradigms

From cultural creation, to preservation, to commercialization and imagination, art drives social movements that shape our understanding of humanity.



Prehistory

Ancient African societies build rich cultural heritage through interdisciplinary innovation rooted in artistry.

4-5C



Black Renaissance, Pan-Africanism, Civil Rights

Exchange of intellectual capital amongst diasporic and Ghanaian thought leaders fosters the use of art for cultural preservation and celebration.

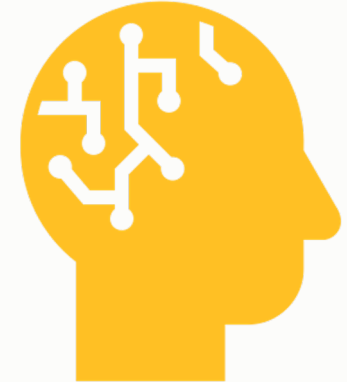
1960s



Present

Commercialization of art allows wider dissemination of black narratives. Shifting power dynamics offer chance for a reset.

2020



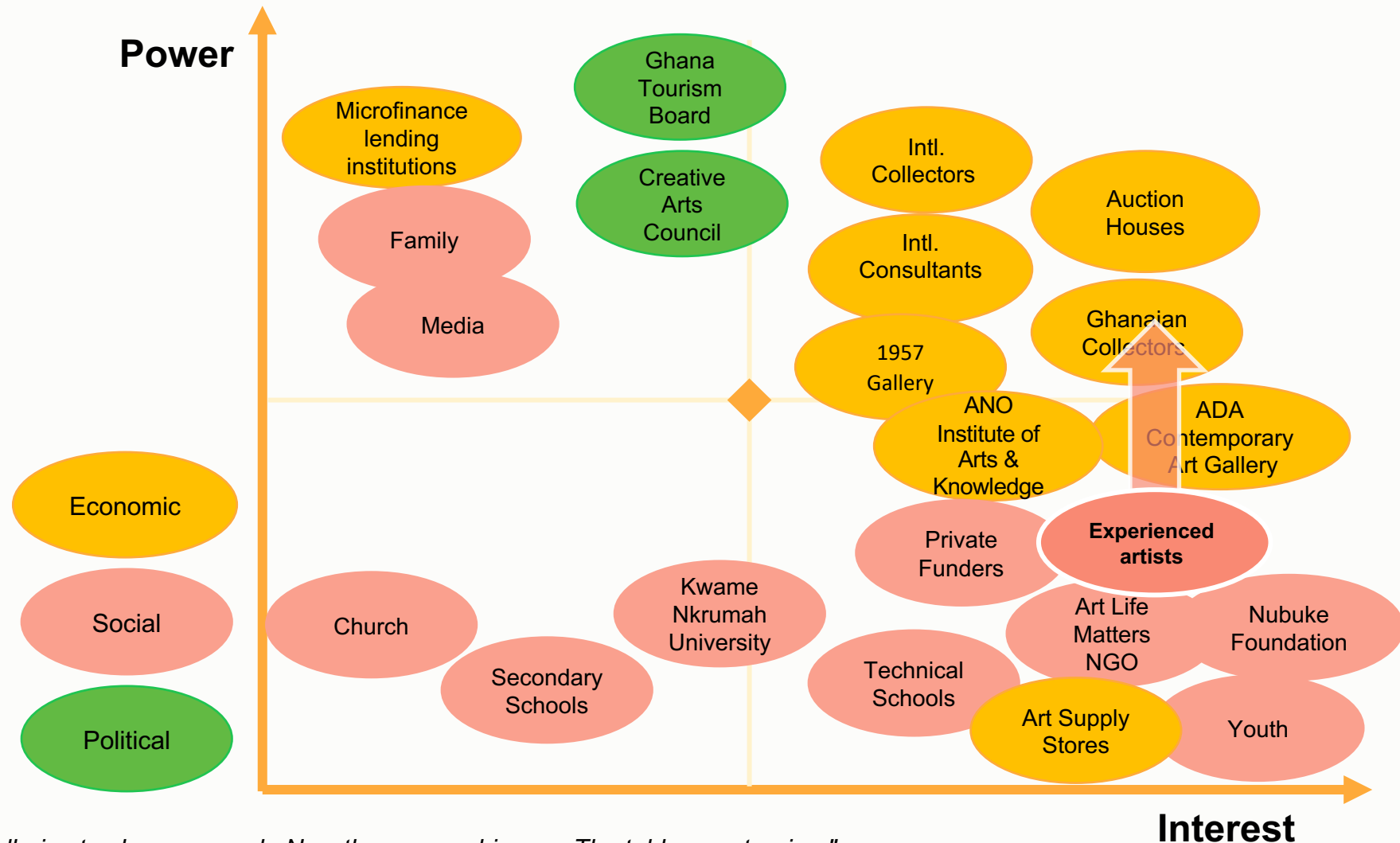
Afrofuturism

Art imagines a utopia beyond the constraints of design thinking frameworks. Black people play a central role in creating the world that serves them.

?

Power and interest dynamics

We mapped the relationship between the power and interest dynamics of stakeholders to decipher how youth can enter and succeed in the art industry. We grouped these into **Social, Political & Economic** themes. While experienced artists have high interest in the system *changing* and low-moderate power, their power is increasing based on the rapid rise of the industry and growing demand. There may be a reckoning as they soon face powerful collectors who are interested in the system remaining *unchanged*.



"We used to have to beg galleries to show our work. Now they are rushing us. The tables are turning."

What forces hold the status quo in place?

- Individuals pursuing **careers other than art**
- Families encourage youth to **pursue other careers**
- Scholarships/government awards **limited to STEM**
- More black art in **news pieces**

Events

- African art becoming **“hot”** in international markets
- **Intermediaries** make large amounts of money from works
- Art schools are **closing**
- Value creation occurs **outside of Africa**

Patterns

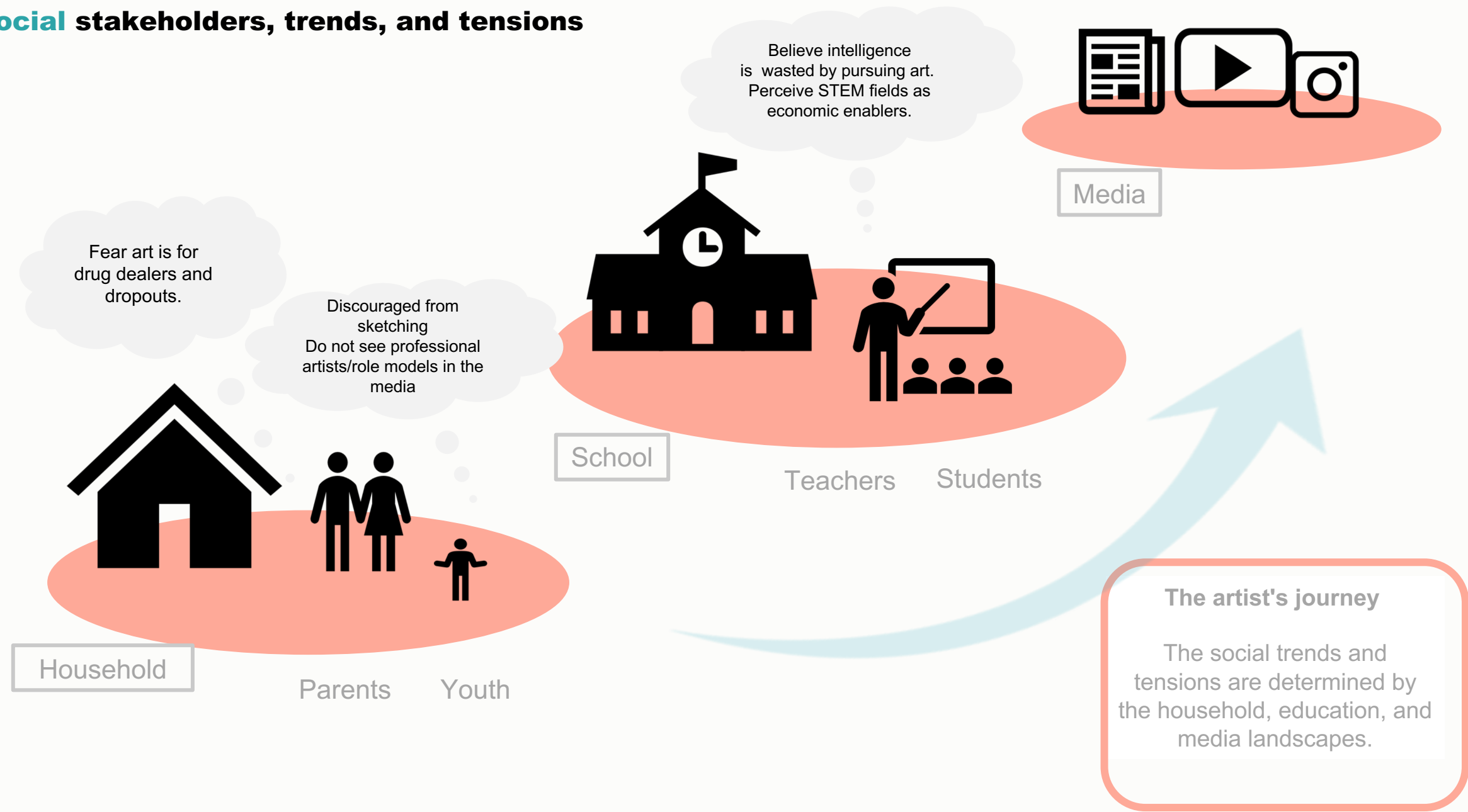
- **Lack of finance** for artists pursuing education or starting businesses
- No legal recourse for **breaches in contracts/agreements**
- BLM raising urgency of **white collectors** to diversify their collections
- Lack of **African intermediaries**
- Lack of **cultural acceptance** of career choice
- Power **imbalances** along the value chain

Structures

- African art is a valuable resource that can be **“exploited” and profited from**
- Belief that artists should be **grateful for the exposure**
- Belief that **art is an investment**, so it is fair to profit from the artists
- Belief that intermediaries add the value
- Extreme views that **“art is a luxury”** or **“art should be for everyone”** instead of art is an industry
- Art is **not a job**
- Artists should struggle and making a **living from art is unicorn event**

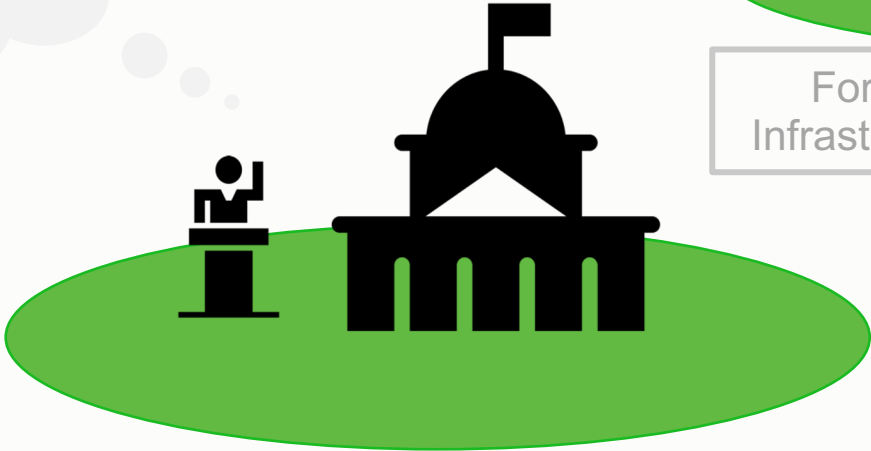
Mental Models

Social stakeholders, trends, and tensions



Political stakeholders, trends, and tensions

Focused on tourism, STEM development and short-term revenue streams



Government

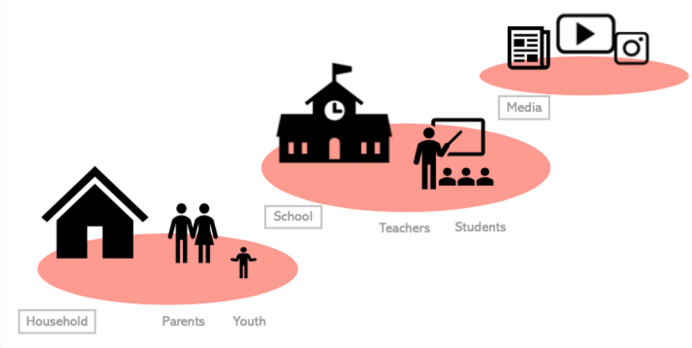


Formal Infrastructure

National Museum
Nonprofit Foundations
Private Galleries

Formal infrastructures lack funding, upkeep, and programming.

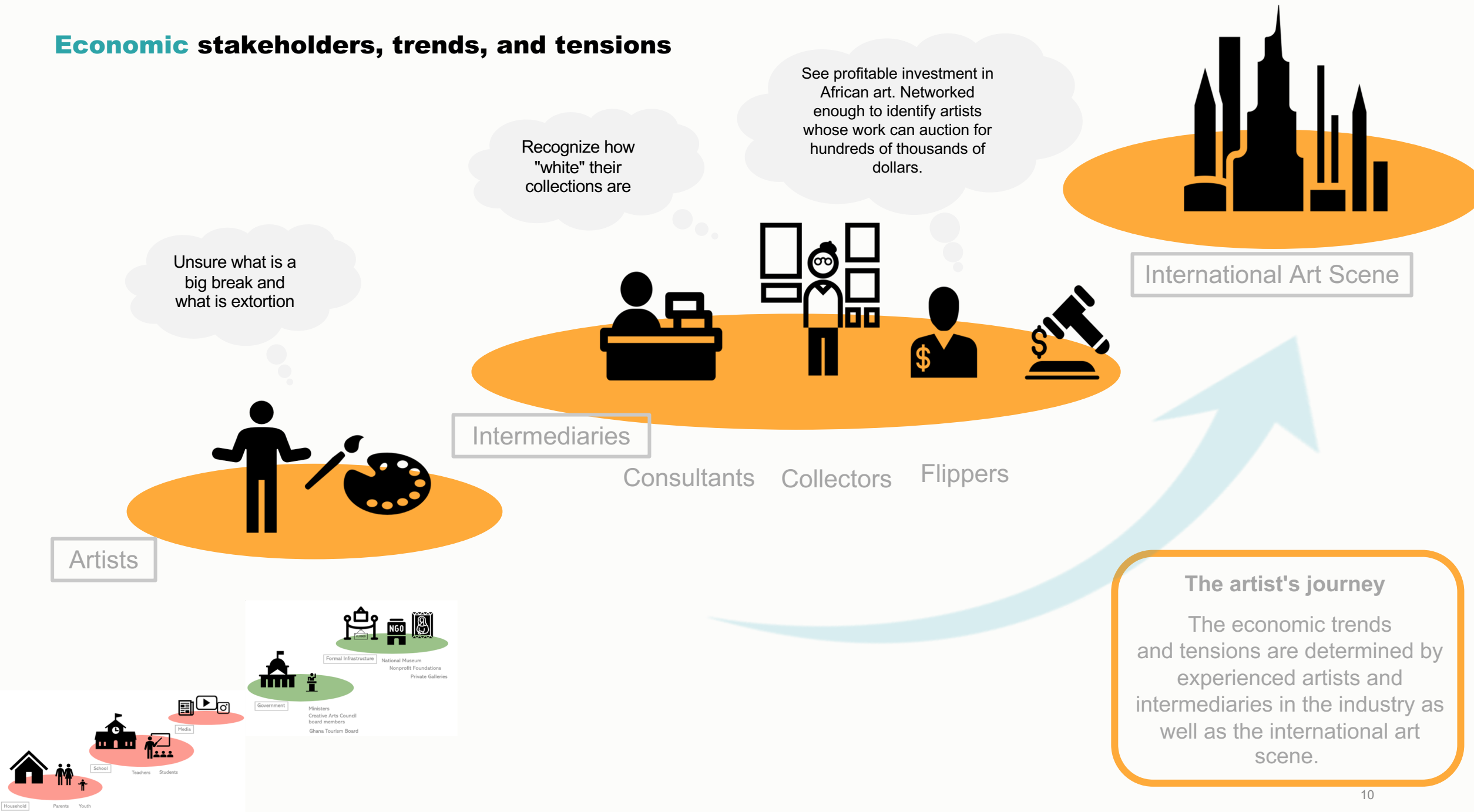
Ministers
Creative Arts Council & Board Members
Ghana Tourism Board



The artist's journey

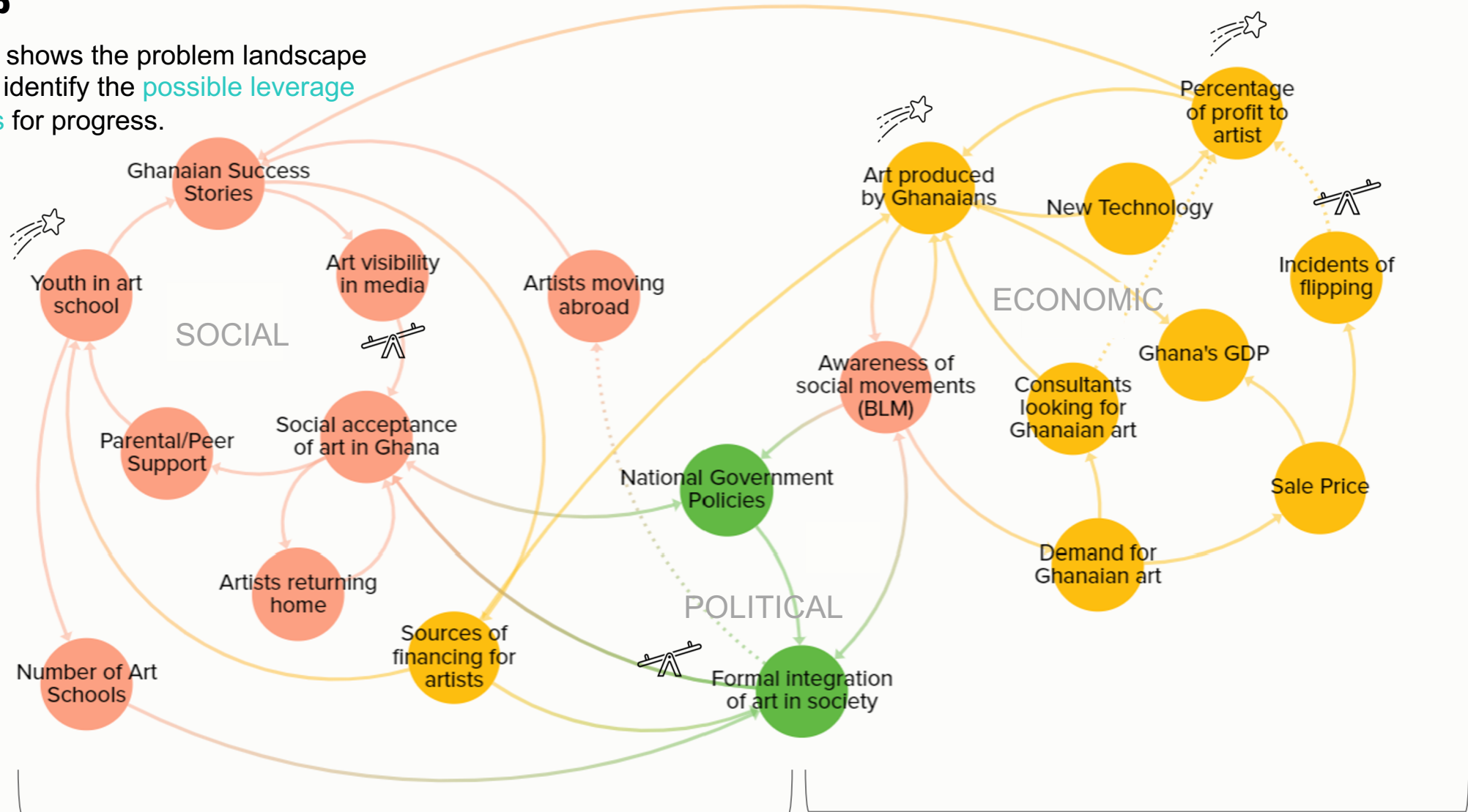
The domestic political trends and tensions are determined by the Ghanaian government and formal infrastructure.

Economic stakeholders, trends, and tensions



Systems Map

The systems map shows the problem landscape and allowed us to identify the possible leverage points and metrics for progress.



System's North Star: A domestic and global environment that enables Ghanaian youth to profit (socially and economically) in the art industry.

Existing Solutions Landscape

Problem

YOUTH NOT PURSUING ART

- Families discourage and forbid youth from studying art
- Beaten in home and school for sketching
- Verbal abuse from peers
- Perception art is for academic failures, drug addicts, dropouts, and stubborn children. 85% of those surveyed in high school art class did not choose to be in the class. Students that showed promise in science but wanted to take art were not allowed.
- No scholarships or financing options available for school or materials
- Unwillingness to pay for art/design in other fields such as building design, filming, etc.
- Minimal recognition of successful artists in media or national structures (museums)
- Few art schools
- Must pay for apprenticeships

YOUTH NOT SUCCEEDING IN THE INDUSTRY

- Lack of data on the industry
- Rapid rise in flippers since George Floyd killing
- Inequitable financial distribution along value chain (works artist has been paid \$500-\$1,000 for go to auction for hundreds of thousands)
- Few supportive domestic intermediaries (ex. Hotels take two pieces after allowing artists to show, even if artist did not sell anything)
- High cost of materials in Ghana
- Opacity of valuing. Galleries lie about how much the works sell for.

Impact Gap

Social acceptance of art as a legitimate industry still inadequate

Still little recognition by government of art as a field of study

Ghanaians may not fully utilize or profit from tech trends such as NFT, given lack of formal infrastructure and education on it.

Local intermediaries are still taking advantage of local artists (i.e., paying international artists more or only showing international artists).

There is still no method to track works or confirm identities of buyers.

Existing Solutions

SOCIETAL AWARENESS

- Art Life Matters nonprofit trying to change culture in schools and among parents by showing successful role models
- Developing own educational programs
- Artists support each other financially and with tips/critiques
- Annual festivals such as Chale Wote
- Foundations and nonprofits (Nubuke)

POLICY

- New Creative Arts Bill
- New Galleries being set up in Ghana (Ada)

TECHNOLOGY

- Formalizing and reducing opacity around sales. Ex. The artist Beeple got 60 out of a 69 million-dollar digital art sale.

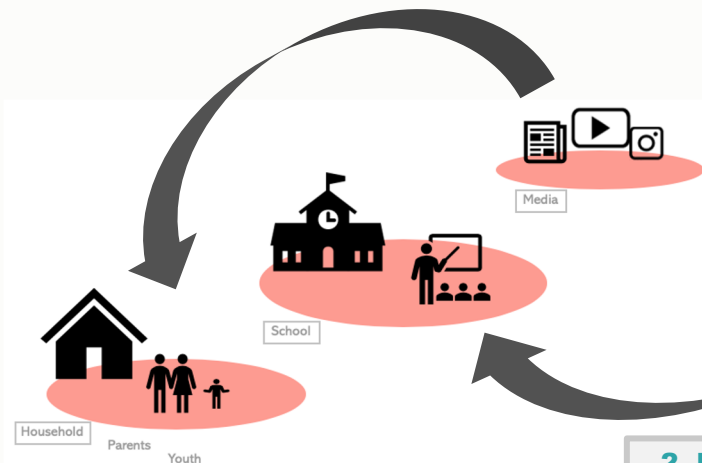
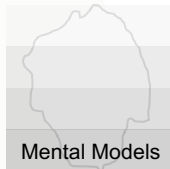
NEGOTIATING POWER

- New rise to artist bargaining power
- Beginning to use contracts that limit buyers from selling works within 5 years
- A new call for artists to demand a majority (>50%) of profit

Where are *leverage points* that would best scale *interventions*?

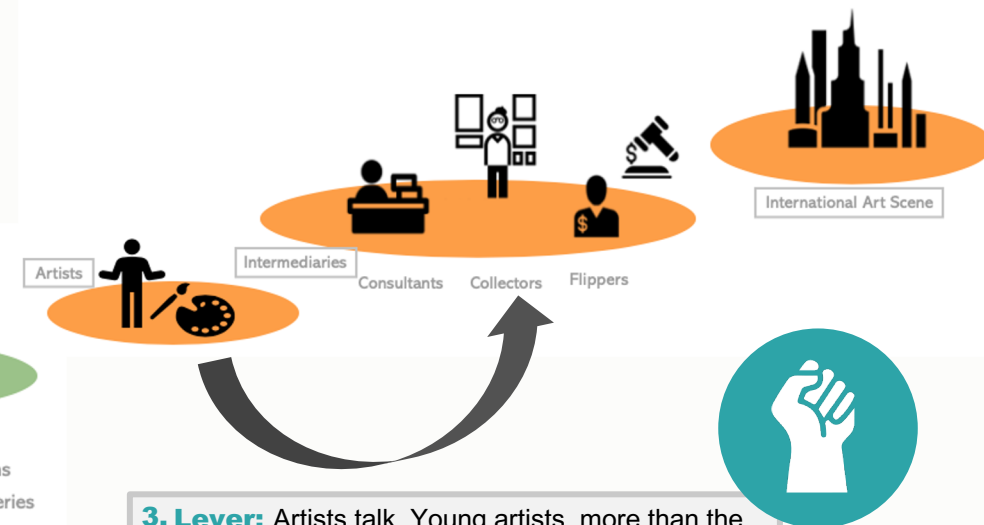
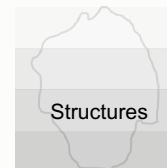
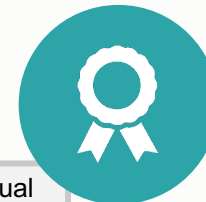
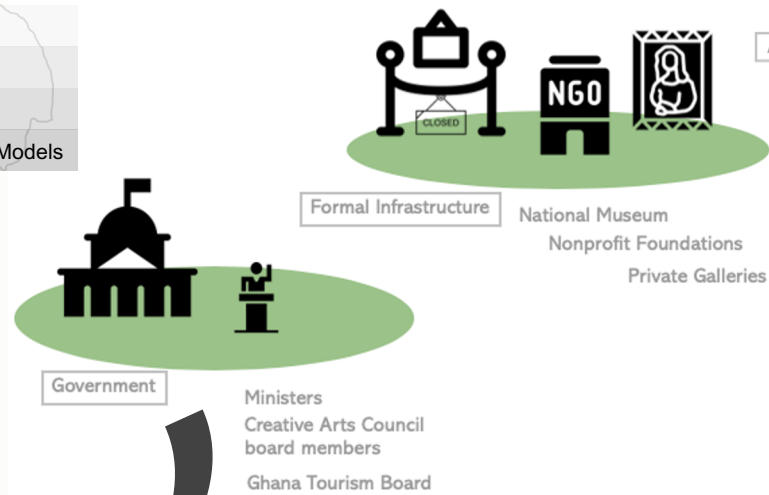
1. Lever: Growth of parental and societal conscious awareness of art as an industry.

Intervention: Showcasing art in the local news (interviews, placing art behind newscasters), stories in magazines in local languages and creating documentaries of successful artists such as Ablade Glover would combat the mental model that art is not a job.



2. Lever: National recognition of art as an intellectual pursuit and professional career path would impact culture at school and perceptions at home.

Intervention: The National Government can offer an annual student award for art. They could also start a national gallery, possibly run through a private, independent operating body.



3. Lever: Artists talk. Young artists, more than the older generation, are transparent about their careers, styles, prices, and professional contacts.

Intervention: The more they share with each other the better they create standard operating practice of calling out flippers, demanding greater profits. As NFT grows, artists will need to learn how to use the tool in their favor.

Collective action will challenge the mental model that the most value is added by those further along the value chain.





“Ghana has a jobs-focused economy but a culture that loves art. [How do you reconcile that?] Let me put it this way, a bottle doesn't know the contents of the liquid it contains, and it has no idea if it's valuable. But someone outside looking in, they see treasure.”

Amakai Queye, Ghanaian artist