

How Bob Dylan Constructed His Visual Artist Identity

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Abstract

Robert Zimmer, known professionally as Bob Dylan, was awarded the 2016 Nobel Prize in Literature. He is recognized globally for his poetic music and the promotion of his paintings since the 1960s. However, his identity as a painter is far less established than his identity as a musician, as it relies more on marketing than on professionalism. A review of art world theories and related materials reveals that Dylan depended on marketing through biographies, galleries, and mass media before 2016, a practice that raised inquiries concerning plagiarism and professionalism. After 2016, Dylan redirected his marketing efforts toward establishing a correlation between music and painting, a strategy that achieved considerable success. Through a case study of Dylan's official art website, the paper utilizes visual semiotics, and reveals his construction of a calm, meditating, and sharp artist identity. Nevertheless, the visual art identity of geography remains tethered to the auditory art identity, and the "other side" persists in its perception as "this side."

Keywords: Bob Dylan; Identity Construction; Visual Art; Art Marketing

1. Introduction

As the winner of the 2016 Nobel Prize for Literature and a representative of the civil rights movement, Bob Dylan is a generational icon and a brilliant songwriter. In recent decades, he has expanded the boundaries of his artistic realm through an interdisciplinary approach: his archives include but are not limited to "manuscripts, notebooks and correspondence; films, videos, photographs, and artwork; memorabilia; personal documents; unrecorded song lyrics and chords" (Firth, 2022).

However, the talented songwriter has remained active in recent years as a musician and is also working to establish his identity as a painter. Both in 2019 and 2022, Dylan organized painting exhibitions in Shanghai, attracting a new generation of fans, and one can't help but wonder when

Dylan became a painter. Furthermore, how was his identity constructed? Is there any correlation between the construction of a painter's identity and that of a musician? Considering these questions when analyzing the development of Dylan's identity as an artist is imperative. The primary goal of this paper is to explore how Dylan constructs his fame as an artist with an established reputation as a musician. Therefore, 2016 became a significant turning point in that it marked the peak of his fame as a musician when he won the Nobel Prize. To achieve the goal, this paper will employ a literature-combining method and textual analysis, alongside the theory of the art world, to achieve this objective.

To date, there has been a paucity of research on the marketing of Bob Dylan's artistic oeuvre, particularly concerning the marketing of his paintings. However, given his reputation as a pop icon, there is a substantial body of literature on his paintings, including exhibitions, artistic reviews, and debates on his photography-based paintings. The present paper will first review his marketing of music, his painting career, and the criticism. Finally, with the distinction of his marketing strategy (whether the music is referred to), his painting strategy was divided in 2016, when he began emphasizing the relationship between his famous music and controversial canvas.

2. Methodology

This paper employs documentary and textual analysis methods to examine the marketing of Bob Dylan from a musician to a painter. By analyzing the existing documents about Dylan's paintings, including art reviews, exhibitions, biographies, journals, and media reactions, this study utilizes the art world theory, focusing on all the processes that Dylan's canvas undergoes to construct his artistic identity. Essentially, his marketing is divided into pre-2016 and post-2016 eras, marked by the nomination for the Nobel Prize when his fame peaked. Furthermore, guided by the visual semiotics of Painter et al. (2013), this paper takes his official website of art as a case study to reveal his marketing and self-construction as an artist. Lastly, it discusses the marketing and its influence on the art world.

3. Art World

Art is defined in various academic sources as "creative aiming at illusion, not reality" (Danto, 1964), which creates "a freshly opened area between real objects and real facsimiles of real objects" (Danto, 1964). This definition is later interpreted as "any candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution". Thus, if it is accepted by museum and gallery directors and purchased by art collectors, it is then baptized as "art" (Freeland, 2002).

In their 2017 study, Lee and Lee categorized extant research on art marketing into three distinct perspectives: marketing by arts organizations, marketing with artworks/artists, and marketing from the art world. First and foremost, marketing for Arts Organizations is a field of study that focuses on cultural institutions that apply marketing concepts and principles (Lee and Lee, 2017). Then, the concept of artwork and artist marketing is predicated on a critical response to the

limitations of the study from an instrumental perspective of art organization marketing (Chong, 2009). Last but not least, marketing in the art world, an area that emphasizes the social and contextual approach to art, exhibits some overlap with the marketing of artists and their respective works (Lee and Lee, 2017). The paper mainly analyzes the marketing of organizations and artists.

The distribution of Dylan's canvas extends beyond the realm of self-support and patronage, garnering significant attention and support from museums. As a renowned artist, Dylan collaborated with galleries on public sales, which included dealers, artists, critics, gallery-goers, and mass media, "proliferation of contact men." The primary function of the dealer is to cultivate public tastes and potential buyers (Berker, 2008), as well as to establish a monopoly on artists. In the case of Dylan, the gallery, curators, and directors function as the dealers, promoting the creativity and originality of his paintings through newspapers and online websites. Dealers' comments become popular and influential. Given Dylan's renown, it is evident that his paintings would have garnered attention in the absence of promotional efforts and accompanying discourse. These remarks and promotional activities, which resemble the marketing strategy previously discussed for the song, primarily functioned to generate widespread attention, thereby facilitating increased foot traffic in a relatively short period.

However, given Dylan's profession, his fans, critics, and art reviewers have high expectations of his paintings, particularly in connection with his musical career. In consideration of Dylan's accomplishments in the domain of lyrical composition, it is evident that the audience, scholars, and critics who have been drawn to his oeuvre in music hold analogous expectations for his artistic pursuits in painting. Despite the evident nature of Dylan's transition into a different artistic medium, the marketing strategies employed in the promotion of his paintings have elevated both the collective expectations and the threshold of acceptance within the artistic community. Conversely, due to his perceived "amateurism," there is dissatisfaction with his photo-based paintings and drawing skills. Therefore, adhering to the originality, creativity, and independence of paintings is doomed. Recognizing the importance of audience connection, particularly with music, Dylan's multifaceted role as both an artist and a businessman has led to the development of a unique intertextual relationship between his paintings and lyrics, satisfying viewers, artists, and critics seeking a deeper connection between the two media. This artistic cross-border relevance provides new avenues for research in the study of paintings and lyrics, offering novel perspectives on the relationship between artistic expression and audience engagement.

4. Pre-2016 Marketing of Dylan

Marketing was not a novel concept for Bob Dylan before the initiation of his visual art campaign; rather, throughout his career, he demonstrated a keen awareness of how strategic self-presentation could shape public perception and cultural reception.

4.1. Marketing as a musician

One of the most significant instances of this can be observed in his efforts to transform his artistic identity from that of a folk singer to that of a poet. This transition was not an incidental development but rather a carefully orchestrated process involving a multifaceted approach that

extended beyond music and into the realm of literary and intellectual discourse. Central to this strategic repositioning was Dylan's highly publicized friendship with Allen Ginsberg, a prominent figure of the Beat Generation and one of the most influential poets of the twentieth century. By leveraging this association, Dylan effectively recast himself as a literary figure, aligning his artistic output with the broader cultural and poetic movements of the era. This shift in identity was particularly noteworthy, given that his relationship with Ginsberg was not rooted in a conventional romantic or mentor-protégé dynamic. Instead, it was characterized by an intellectual and artistic camaraderie that allowed Dylan to bridge the divide between music and literature uniquely and compellingly.

Dylan's efforts to reinforce his poetic identity were particularly evident in 1965, a period during which Ginsberg's literary reputation was at its zenith. Dylan leveraged Ginsberg's standing within the literary world through a series of meticulously curated visual and verbal cues designed to solidify the connection between them. One such instance was the album cover of "Bringing It All Back Home", which served as a symbolic representation of their artistic kinship. Ginsberg himself further validated this narrative by explicitly articulating his views on Dylan's poetic sensibilities, thereby legitimizing his transition from folk singer to poet in the eyes of the literary establishment and the general public. This strategy extended beyond album imagery and personal endorsements; in D. A. Pennebaker's documentary "Don't Look Back" (1967), Dylan deliberately alluded to his relationship with Ginsberg, featuring him prominently in the film and referring to him as his "poet friend." This deliberate inclusion served not only to authenticate Dylan's literary aspirations but also to position him within the avant-garde countercultural movement of the time. Moreover, in Sam Shepard's "Rolling Thunder Logbook", Dylan's presence alongside Ginsberg at Jack Kerouac's gravesite was depicted in a highly symbolic manner, characterizing them as "three poets, one dead, two living" (Hishmeh, 2006). This framing serves to reinforce the evolving artistic identity of Dylan, situating him within a lineage of American literary figures that includes both Ginsberg and Kerouac. Consequently, it elevates Dylan's status beyond that of a mere musician, bestowing upon him the status of a cultural intellectual.

While Dylan's songwriting has long been recognized for its poetic qualities, the process of establishing him as a legitimate poet in the traditional literary sense necessitated a sustained period of critical scrutiny and reevaluation. At the time, poetry was conventionally understood as a literary form distinct from song lyrics, and the classification of Dylan's work as poetry required significant discourse within academic and artistic circles. Consequently, if Dylan's reception as a poet had been predicated exclusively on the textual analysis of his lyrics, the process of attaining such a designation would likely have been protracted and subject to greater resistance. However, his association with Ginsberg accelerated this transition, allowing him to bypass traditional literary gatekeeping mechanisms and gain credibility within intellectual and artistic communities in a manner that was both rapid and highly effective. This suggests that, although he may not have formally developed marketing acumen in a commercial sense, Dylan demonstrated an aptitude for shaping public perception through strategic cultural alliances.

Dylan's lack of formal expertise in marketing was counterbalanced by his capacity to engage and captivate audiences through his crossover style, which merged folk music, poetry, and countercultural symbolism. During this period, Dylan's promotional approach included the deployment of slogans such as "The Other Side of Bob Dylan," as well as a series of teasers designed to generate intrigue and sustain public interest. These promotional efforts proved to be remarkably effective in expanding Dylan's appeal beyond the folk music genre and into the literary and artistic domains. As his renown expanded, his work underwent rigorous critical scrutiny, leading to its recognition by a diverse audience that included listeners, the artistic community, and academics. This process of intellectual and artistic validation played a pivotal role in establishing Dylan as an iconic figure during the Civil Rights Movement and ultimately contributed to his subsequent accolade with the Nobel Prize in Literature.

4.2. Marketing as a Painter

Dylan's career as a painter commenced in the 1960s, reaching its zenith in 2016 with his receipt of the Nobel Prize in Literature, a distinction that brought his artistic pursuits into the realm of the visual and the musical. However, the reception of his painting exhibitions by critics was not uniformly positive. During an exhibition in Copenhagen, he was criticized by the press for what they perceived as a prioritization of financial gain over artistic integrity. In the Halcyon Gallery of London, his inaugural public exhibition was characterized by the newspapers as "daubs" and "limited-valued" work of a "hobby painter" (Burton, 2010). At the Louth auction, John Pooley, the owner of Lincoln Art Works, critiqued the paintings as massive and his identity as a musician and artist as uncommon. Furthermore, the public did not attend his exhibitions primarily for the paintings. British audiences of all ages, professions, and genders attended his exhibition due to his songs and reputation, despite the questionable quality of the Mimas in the exhibition. Additionally, Rob Bowman, a musicologist from York University, has criticized him for creating fame, celebrity, and business for the gallery (Crawford, 2011). Despite his efforts to link music and painting, his paintings were still perceived as a subordinate substitute for music (The Economist, 2018).

The artist's marketing strategy has been observed to transform response to market feedback, which the paper categorizes into two phases: pre-2016 and post-2016. The distinction between these phases is rooted in the strategic realignment of his marketing approach, which initially positioned musical achievements as an extension of his visual art. This shift was first exhibited at the Halcyon Gallery in London in 2016, marking a transition from a differentiation of identities as a painter and musician to a combination of both roles. Before 2016, he maintained that paintings were not mere illustrations of songs, positioning them as a distinct artistic endeavor (Carter, 2010). However, following 2016, the interconnection between his musical compositions and visual artworks became a focal point. A notable challenge emerged on September 28, 2011, when the public questioned the authenticity of his artistic style, leading to a discourse surrounding originality and creativity in the arts. Consequently, a pivotal aspect of his promotional strategy involved addressing these concerns and defending his artistic approach.

During the period preceding 2016, the artist's marketing strategy centered on establishing a connection between his fame and visual art, with a particular emphasis on the paintings

themselves. Biographies played a pivotal role in promoting his visual art. In a series of books published to commemorate his 67th birthday, the Drawn Blank Series was featured, showcasing his first museum exhibit and indicating a refined taste (Bream, 2008). The galleries participating in the marketing of these exhibitions have lauded Dylan and his compositions as authentic and personal experiences from life, such as the Asia Series displayed at the Gagosian Gallery in New York, which was asserted to be based on Dylan's visual reflection on his travels in Japan, China, Vietnam, and Korea with "first-hand depictions of people, street scenes, architecture, and landscape." The marketing process has also involved curators and directors. For instance, the museum director of the National Gallery in Copenhagen lauded him as "a remarkable visual artist" (Carter, 2011). However, the paintings exhibited at the Gagosian Gallery were discovered to be replicas of historical photographs by Henri Cartier-Bresson, Leon Busy, Dmitri Kessel, and others (Rose, 2011; Itzkoff, 2011). In the wake of this controversy, the gallery modified its marketing strategy, stating that it was "based on a variety of sources, including archival and historic images" while maintaining its position on the authenticity of the colors and textures from Dylan's travels in Asia (Itzkoff, 2011). Finally, auctions served as a foundation for the valuation of his paintings as sound investments. For instance, Alastair McPhie-Meiklejon of Louth, a seasoned auctioneer, regarded his paintings as "appreciating assets," anticipating a sale price of 30,000 pounds. This valuation was influenced by the artist's multifaceted persona, encompassing his roles as a musician and icon. Moreover, his music writers and admirers have demonstrated a readiness to defend his marketing strategies in the aftermath of the copycat debate that followed the London exhibition. During the aforementioned copycat debate, which ensued following the London exhibition, Dylan was defended by Jim Linderman, a music writer and fan, who characterized the practice as "a time-honored practice" (Crawford, 2011).

This paper posits that marketing, particularly through mass communication channels such as newspaper features, radio broadcasts, and television interviews, serves as a critical mechanism for accelerating an artist's rise to prominence. However, while strategic promotion can facilitate the rapid ascension of an artist within the public consciousness, it is unlikely that such marketing tactics alone can sustain an artist's legacy in the absence of substantive artistic contributions. The scrutiny imposed by audiences, scholars, and the art world ensures that commercial strategies, while influential, are not sufficient in and of themselves to establish an artist's credibility in the long term. Consequently, while Dylan's career undeniably benefited from well-crafted marketing efforts and cultural positioning, his enduring success must be attributed primarily to his intrinsic artistic aptitude, literary acumen, and ability to transcend conventional artistic boundaries. These elements, rather than being merely promotional, serve as the foundation of his lasting influence, ensuring that his legacy persists not merely as a product of effective branding but as a testament to his genuine contributions to music, poetry, and cultural history.

5. Post-2016 Marketing of Dylan

In the post-2016 phase, the marketing of his paintings encompasses several aspects. First, curators and directors continued to function in their traditional roles. For instance, Paul Green, the curator of the Halcyon Gallery, asserted that exhibitiongoers sought his art for its own sake

(Hudson, 2016). Michael Chaiken, the curator of the Gilcrease Museum, underscored the creativity inherent in Dylan's visual art (Price, 2019). Bill Flanagan, the curator of Dylan's inaugural retrospective, promoted the Bob Dylan Editions at Halcyon Gallery in London as "tirelessly creative," "horizon-widening," and "a panoramic view of the American landscape" (ContentEngine). Shai Baitel, the artistic director of the Forest Art Museum, characterized Dylan as a "true, contemporary Renaissance artist alive," and his supervisor, Jordana Pomeroy, the director, regarded Dylan as a "tremendous artist" (Hall, 2021). Concurrently, Dylan himself was grappling with the challenge of integrating drawing into his musical reputation. In a display at the Halcyon Gallery, which will conclude on January 31, 2021, he presented the handwritten lyrics of his renowned compositions, including "The Times They Are A-Changin'," illustrated with drawings that integrated music, lyrics, and images, bridging the gap between artistic expression and commercial interests (ibid.). In a separate exhibition at the Halcyon Gallery in London, Dylan presented a film that highlighted the interconnection between music and visual art (Hudson, 2016). This connection has become a significant selling point, prompting questions about its extent and impact on the public.

Another piece of news has emerged, further burnishing the reputation of Dylan's paintings, despite the absence of any official marketing initiatives on the part of his team. Pierce Brosnan, the actor who has portrayed James Bond, has resold a painting by Dylan for a sum of one million Singapore dollars. In doing so, Brosnan underscored the interconnection between music and the painting, emphasizing its therapeutic effect in the wake of the demise of his daughter, Charlotte. This strategic execution underscores the musicality of Dylan's paintings, captivating the public and solidifying his identity as a multifaceted visual artist.

6. Marketing of Dylan's Art Website

Influenced by Halliday's systemic functional theory, as well as Kress and van Leeuwen's visual meaning, Painter et al. (2013) outline a visual narration for multiple images. Basically, to underscore the marketing of Dylan, the paper applies the focalization-pathos-ambience framework of interpersonal meaning to reveal relationships between "the viewer and the depiction," from the power relations, along with affectual dimensions. According to Painter et al (2013), the researchers outline the framework in Figure 1 based on five photos from the official website of Bob Dylan Art (<https://bobdylanart.com/>).

First of all, in terms of focalization, all five images remain unmediated (objective), shot from a non-character perspective. To be specific, there are characters (Bob Dylan himself) in three photos (Figure 2, 4, 6). Out of three photos, Dylan in Figures 2 and 6 does not have contact with the viewers (an observer perspective). In Figure 2, Dylan works with concentration while he sees far away, sharply in Figure 6. In doing so, as Painter et al (2013) proposed, Dylan creates a longer social distance with viewers, emphasizing his calmness and objectiveness as an artist. In Figure 4, however, he tries to engage with the viewers with a meditating and focused direct gaze. This behavior, as Painter et al (2013) put it, is utilized to "heighten identification or empathy at key

moments”. Combined with the text along with Figure 4, his inviting gaze to the viewers aims to reinforce his artist and whiskey spokesperson identity.

Moreover, alienating pathos is conducted in Figures 2, 3, and 5. As Feng (2015) suggests, it invites viewers to read “critically and objectively.” Figures 4 and 6 create an appreciative minimalist style to evoke emotions of calmness and meditation, respectively. With the texts of the images, Figure 4 associates tastes, calmness, and sharpness with the whisky he represents. Meanwhile, Figure 6 attracts viewers to follow Dylan’s gaze with the texts and meditation. Overall, they all shape an objective, calm, observing, and meditating artist image of Dylan.

Furthermore, a contrast between a denied (black) background and an activated (ambient) photo appears in all Figures. Specifically, Figures 2 to 5 use a vibrant color to formulate “exciting and active” emotions (Feng, 2015). Then, Figures 2, 3, and 5 use a warm color and naturalistic familiarity to construct a cozy and harmonious atmosphere, serving to construct an imaginative, active, and lively artist identity. While Figures 4 and 6 create an alienated, cold, and constrained atmosphere for their publicizing purpose in using cold colors and abstract familiarity.

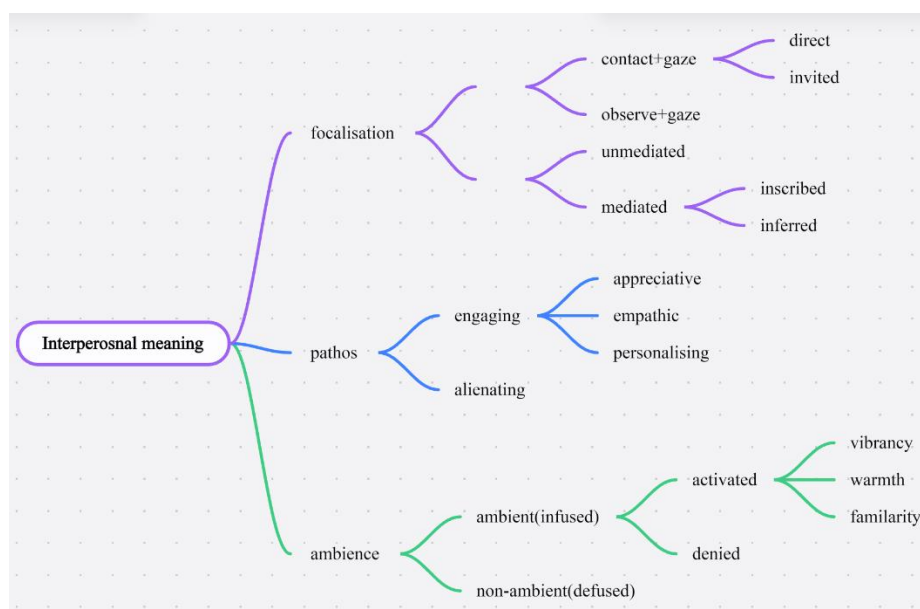


Figure 1. Outline of the interpersonal meaning of visual semiotics

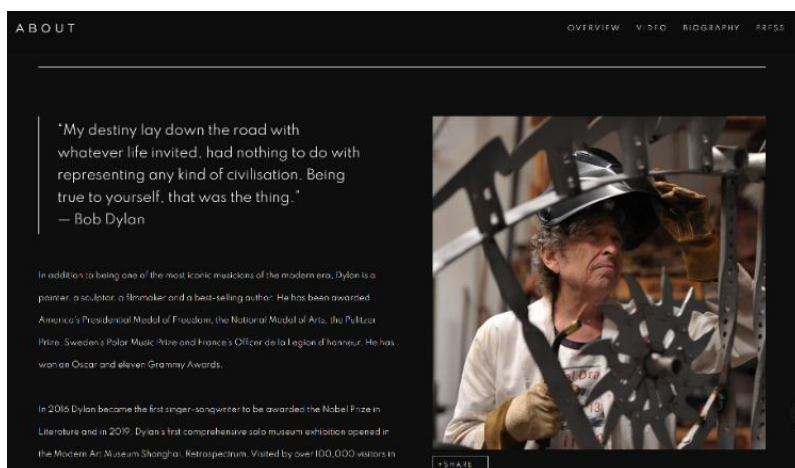


Figure 2. Bob Dylan art: About page

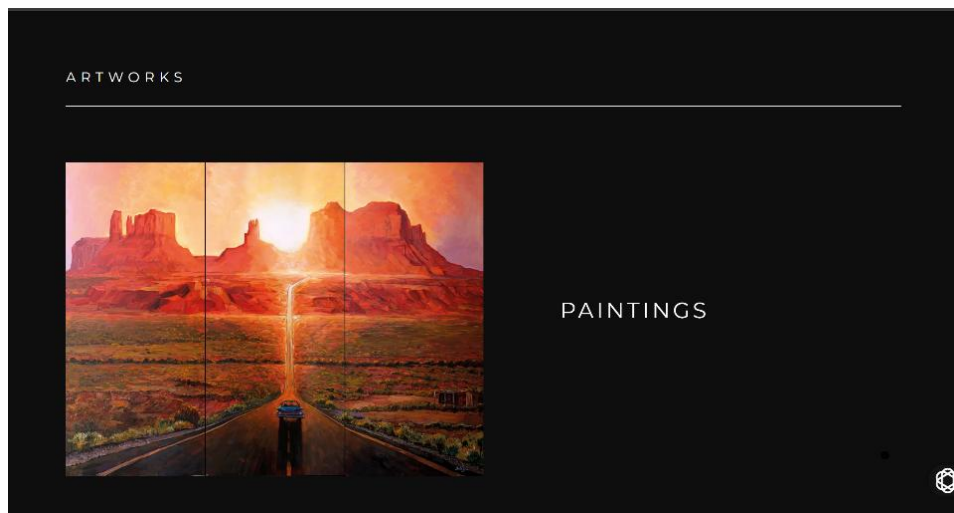


Figure 3. Bob Dylan art: artworks page

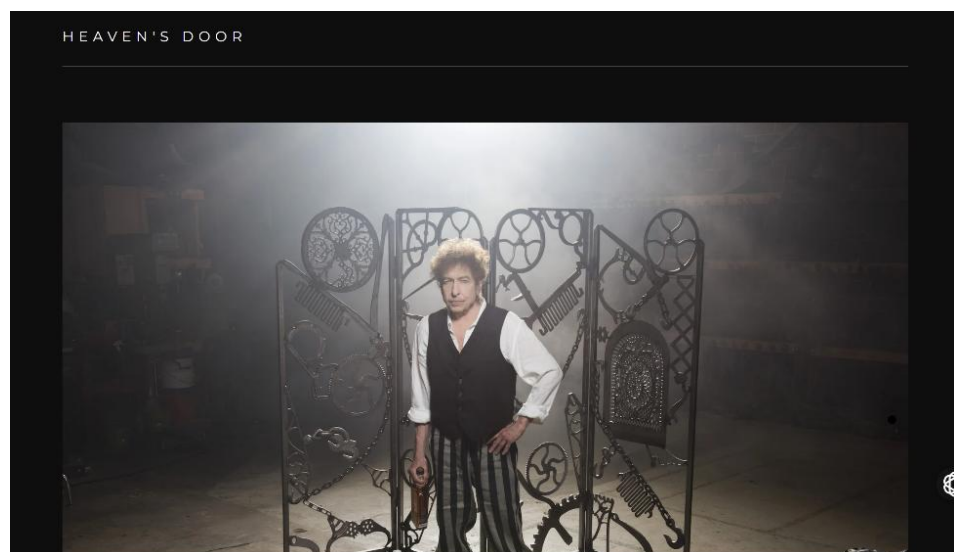


Figure 4. Bob Dylan art: Heaven's door page

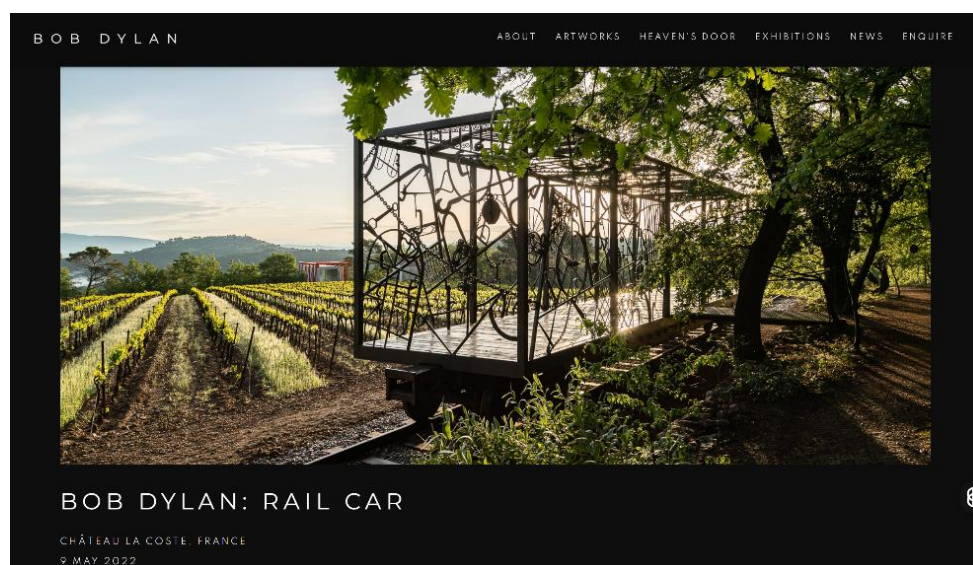


Figure 5. Bob Dylan art: exhibitions page

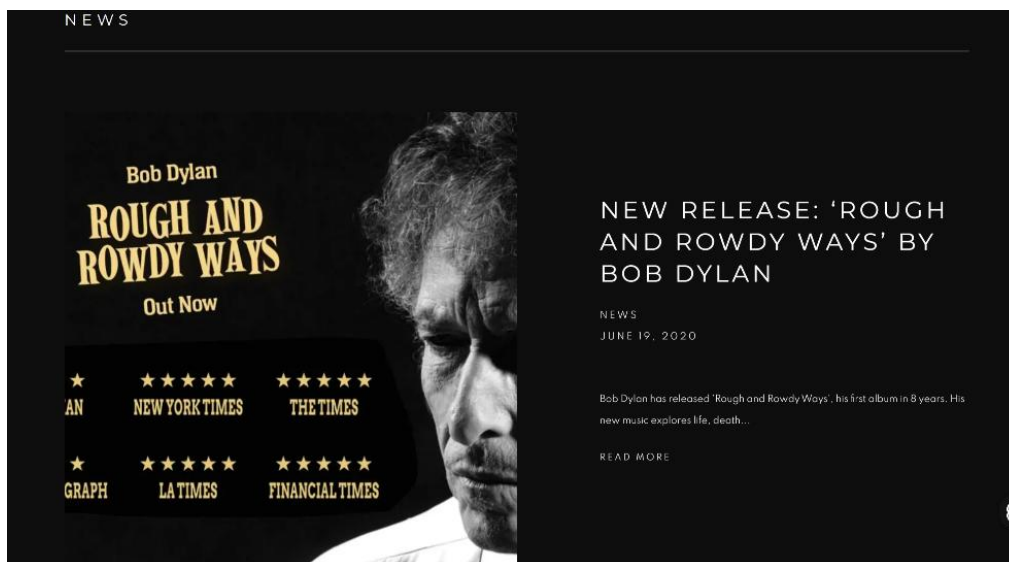


Figure 6. Bob Dylan art: news page

7. Marketing Strategy- Combining Music and Drawings

Nevertheless, how he markets the linkage between his music and visual art remains a subject of interest. The combination can be approached in explicit and implicit ways. First of all, concerning explicit linkage, he places handwritten lyrics alongside images. Examples of this include the lyrics to “Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat,” “Maggie’s Farm,” “Just Like a Woman,” “Don’t Think Twice (It’s All Right),” “Ballad of a Thin Man,” and “Man in the Long Black Coat,” which are illustrated in the paintings where his imagistic mind and songs are open to reinterpretation (The Economist, 2018).

Previously, listeners could only interpret the music of Bob Dylan by relating it to his biographies, autobiographies, and historical research. Now, however, scholars and listeners alike have a further opportunity to learn about the artist. In considering the sequential arrangement of artistic compositions, it can be posited that the paintings function not merely as independent artistic creations but also as supplementary commentaries to the lyrical compositions. This provides novel perspectives and conceptual frameworks for interpreting artistic metaphors. The paintings in question attract his former audiences and researchers to reenter his mental and psychological world in a novel way, thereby demonstrating intertextuality and multimodality. Consequently, curators, galleries, and directors market the relationship between Dylan’s music and paintings. Paul Green, the director of Halcyon Gallery, believed that Dylan’s paintings were chosen to show “humanity, places and people,” fascinated by painters, writers, and musicians (Aesthetica Magazine, 2013). Also, he asserted that the paintings were a visual way to discover the soul of Dylan’s songs.

8. New Art World or Old One Still

The art world is characterized by a multifaceted structure, encompassing both micro and macro levels. At the micro level, the art world encompasses the intimate sphere of individual artists and

their creative networks. At the macro level, the art world is comprised of the broader commercial and institutional frameworks that facilitate the distribution and reception of art. The art world is sustained by a collective network that enables the presentation and dissemination of artistic performances to the public. However, in the case of Bob Dylan, the influence of the micro-level artistic community, comprising fellow artists, critics, and smaller creative circles, appears to be less pronounced in comparison to the macro-level entities, such as commercial galleries, mass media, and the wider art market. The promotional efforts of these large-scale institutional and commercial players, combined with Dylan's pre-existing global reputation, exert a significant influence on shaping public perception of his visual artwork. Consequently, the assessment of Dylan's paintings is frequently less dependent on their inherent artistic qualities, such as creativity, originality, and technical mastery, and more dependent on the promotional narratives crafted by galleries and media outlets. While art critics and reviewers may engage in discourse regarding the artistic merit of Dylan's work, their critiques often find themselves influenced by the dominant marketing strategies and Dylan's established celebrity status, which overshadows the assessment of his artistic qualities.

Moreover, Dylan's presence within the macro-level art world is inextricably linked to his longstanding prominence in the field of music. According to Baumann (2007), there are more discourses for the art world to discuss art. Therefore, the artistic criticisms, as well as curators and the art dealers on Dylan's side, exert powerful discourses in defining Dylan's paintings as art. His renown as a musician fundamentally shapes audience expectations, fostering a perception that his visual art should maintain a connection to his musical legacy. This expectation is further reinforced by his active collaboration with commercial galleries, which frequently position his paintings within the broader context of his musical career. Consequently, Dylan occupies a distinctive position within the art world, as his work is evaluated not only through the lens of visual artistic traditions but also through the cultural and commercial frameworks of the music industry. His engagement with visual art is characterized by an intersection between musical influence and artistic production, an approach that differentiates him from conventional visual artists who emerge through traditional artistic channels.

However, when examining Dylan's artistic trajectory through the lens of the musical social network as an art world in itself, it becomes evident that his primary focus remains anchored within the traditional art milieu. While his visual art may incorporate musical themes and resonate with his audience's familiarity with his songwriting, his engagement with the visual medium does not necessarily redefine or expand the boundaries of musical artistry within the broader cultural landscape. Instead, Dylan's artistic endeavors reflect an ongoing negotiation between his established identity as a musician and his aspirations as a painter, revealing the complex interplay between artistic reputation, institutional validation, and audience reception in shaping his place within the art world.

This phenomenon, that a professional musician works as a painter, formed by the discourse of the art world, reveals that traditional art world hierarchies are reinforced by a celebrity's status. This can be proved by the art world's legalization of Andy Warhol as a creative leader, who is "recognized by peers, intermediaries, and audiences," and hence becomes "insiders and outsiders

in the art world, which maintains his “artistic deviance while accessing resources from the core of the art world” (Samdanis & Lee, 2021). Those celebrities’ discourses in the art world facilitate their rapid rise in a disciplinary area, while their criticisms are undoubtedly defended by their peers. For example, when Dylan was accused of copycat of old photos, public media and the Gagosian Gallery were prone to be blamed by professional art critics, while Dylan’s plagiarism was justified as a method of “appropriation” (Morgan, 2011). Also, Morgan unveils that other celebrities (singers, film stars, performers, etc.) have painted and gained reputations. This means that despite their amateurism, those art dealers, critics, and galleries have constructed and welcomed their artworks, occupying spaces of to-be-famous artists.

10. Conclusion and Discussion

The marketing strategy employed by Bob Dylan concerning his visual artwork has undergone a notable evolution, reflecting broader shifts in both public perception and critical reception.

Prior to 2016, Dylan deliberately sought to establish a clear distinction between his musical career and his work as a visual artist, presenting the latter as an independent and alternative dimension of his artistic expression. This strategic positioning aimed to reinforce the legitimacy of his canvas work by ensuring that it was not perceived merely as an extension of his musical legacy. However, the emergence of the copycat controversy, which cast doubt on the authenticity of his visual art, necessitated a recalibration of this approach. In response, Dylan embarked on a publicity campaign that not only foregrounded his recognition as the recipient of the 2016 Nobel Prize in Literature but also emphasized the intrinsic relationship between his music and his canvas paintings. This revised strategy proved highly effective, garnering significant acclaim from influential cultural figures, including prominent actors associated with the James Bond franchise. Furthermore, art galleries and critics increasingly embraced the notion of Dylan as a “visual songwriter,” acknowledging his capacity to evoke emotion and provide solace through his paintings in much the same manner as he does through his music. Consequently, the volume of criticism directed at his work diminished considerably, and discussions surrounding his status as an amateur painter became less prevalent in critical discourse.

Given Dylan’s undeniable achievements in music and literature, it would be strategically advantageous for him to maintain and develop the music-painting synergy that has become central to his artistic identity. Moreover, his visual artwork integrates elements of folk tradition, a characteristic that has sparked ongoing debates about the originality of his style. While some critics question the extent to which his paintings represent innovative contributions to the visual arts, this approach has generally been well received by music enthusiasts, who recognize and appreciate the continuity of themes and stylistic elements across his various artistic endeavors. However, one particular dimension of Dylan’s artistic practice remains a source of contention: his ongoing exploration of musical composition on canvas. This aspect of his work remains firmly aligned with his established artistic sensibilities, yet it also elicits mixed reactions, with some viewing it as a repetition of familiar motifs rather than a bold departure into new creative territory. As such, Dylan’s artistic trajectory raises broader questions about the intersection of music and

visual art, the limits of artistic originality, and the evolving nature of public and critical engagement with his work.

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