

PRELIMINARY VERSION

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“Art Dealers’ Strategy”

The case of Goupil, Boussod & Valadon from 1860 to 1914

ABSTRACT

Despite the existence of a large literature dedicated to the art market, the management of art galleries remains a black box as both buyers and sellers put a high value on discretion. This paper overcomes the traditional lack of quantitative data by analysing the complete books of one of the most successful French galleries at the end of the 19th century: Goupil, Boussod & Valadon. This original database covers the sale of more than 40,000 artworks that occurred between 1860 and 1914. Rapidity to sell artworks was a key element in Goupil’s strategy. As a whole Goupil sold 71% of artworks bought. Out of the sold artworks, almost 80% were sold within a year (with 22% before the acquisition reflecting orders). Goupil extracted a higher return from aristocrats and competitors whereas branches and large buyers were getting a discount. Artworks from artists in residence were on average providing lower returns but were less likely to be sold at a loss.

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Keywords: Art market, Art Investment, Art Gallery, French Economic History

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