

# The Souvenir as Art: Can Travel Trinkets Really Be Considered Art?

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## Abstract

The purchase of travel remembrances or souvenirs is a time-honored tradition. The souvenir is a complex psychological, sociological, anthropological, and marketing artifact. Purchases of, or collection of, souvenirs has long been thought to be a significant part of a traveler's overall experience.

Travelers desire a means to both remember and share their experiences. Souvenirs offer one way to transform the intangible into the tangible. Upon their return, travelers use souvenirs as a way to stop time so as to effectively remember their experiences, to allow for sharing of those experiences, and to prove the experience occurred (Gordon, 1986). When individuals desire to identify with a place, they will keep artifacts from that place.

The truth is that few people will take a trip without acquiring some form of evidence to tangibilize the experiences gained (Littrell et.al., 1994). These remembrances take on special value for the collector. To the collector, the souvenirs are not simply relics, mementos, keepsakes or curios. The souvenir provides the collector with "a connection with an actual person, place or event – in short it is an association object (Bird, 2013)." Simply put, we all like to collect stuff -- "the impulse to collect, to accumulate, even to hoard has been with us for a long time. (Conn, 2015)"

The preceding discussion utilized one of the typical definitions of souvenir, as anything that acts as a artifact of one's experience. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a souvenir as "a thing that is kept as a reminder of a person, place, or event."

A less commonly used definition defines a souvenir as "tourist art" (Lasusa, 2007). Are souvenirs from trips art? Do these "travel trinkets" adhere to traditional definitions of art? As noted in many places, the market for visual/fine arts is a multi-billion dollar world-wide market (Velthuis, 2007). Are souvenirs really part of this market? If so, are there some marketing parallels that artists could borrow from the marketing of souvenirs?

This paper seeks to first draw some parallels between the markets for souvenirs and the market for fine art. We will then seek to use these parallels to offer some marketing suggestions to artists borrowed from the souvenir market.

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**Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and Practitioners:.** This study discusses similarities between the markets for souvenirs and for fine arts. How viewing the souvenirs as fine art provide insights into the marketing of fine art to artists.

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**TRACK:** Music, Arts, and Entertainment