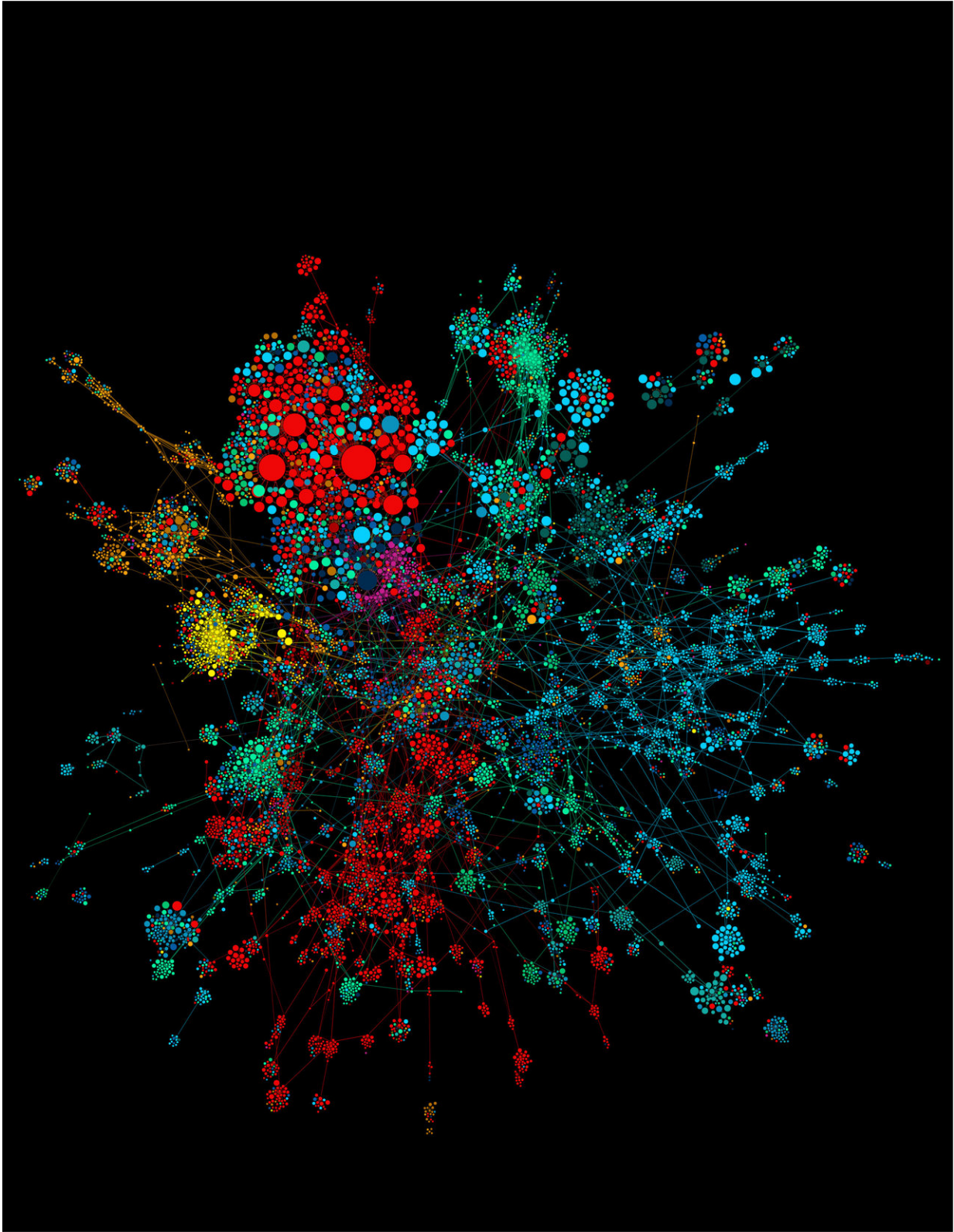


# **Study suggests initial success in prestigious institutions key to lifelong artistic achievement**

November 9 2018, by Bob Yirka

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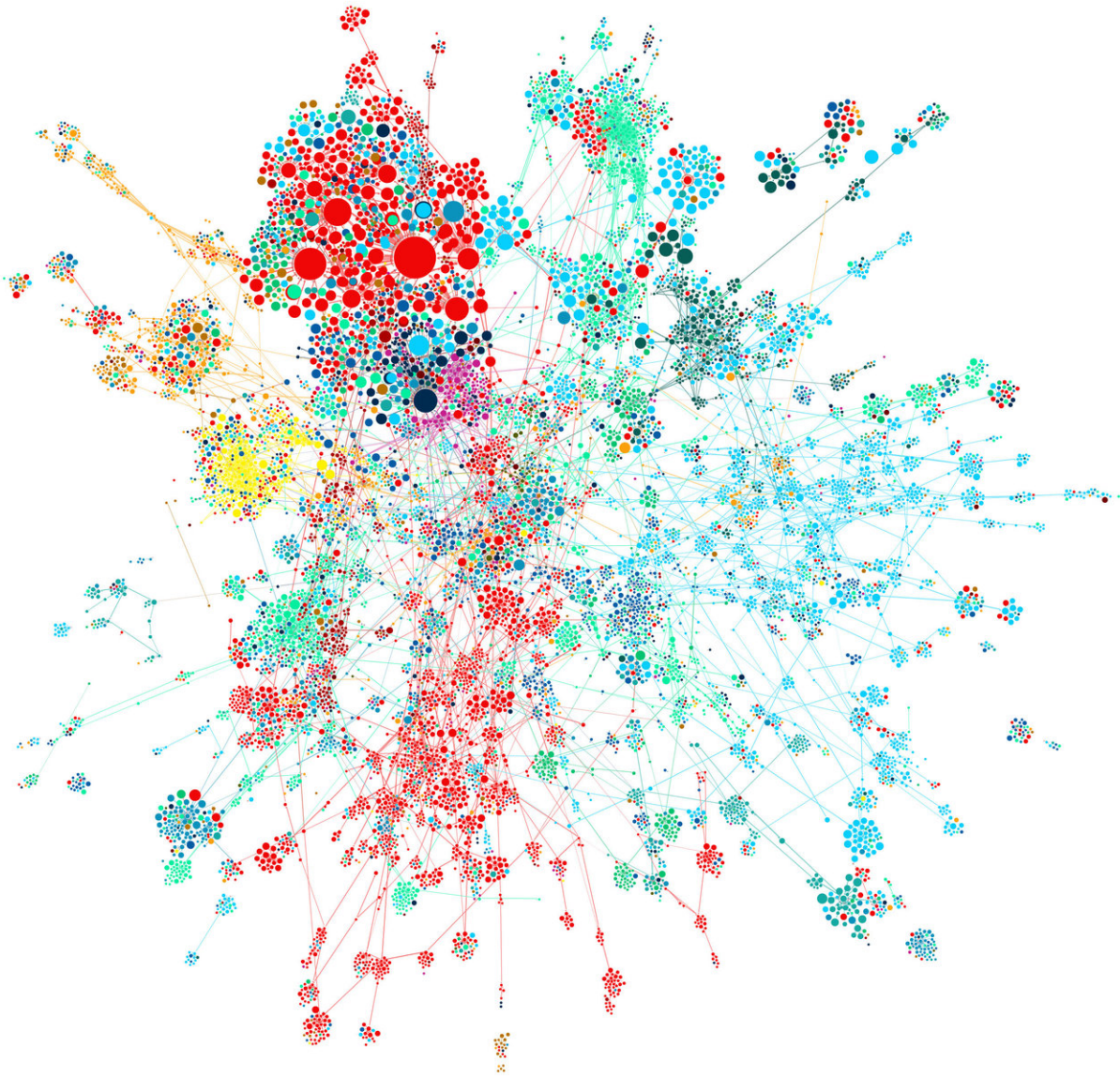
Co-exhibition network, whose nodes are art institutions (galleries, museums).

Node size is proportional to each institution's prestige. Nodes are connected if they both exhibited the same artist. Credit: Samuel P. Fraiberger, Alice Grishchenko, Albert-László Barabási

An international team of researchers has found that early exposure by certain art institutions is a major factor in lifelong success as an artist. In their paper published in the journal *Science*, the group describes their study of artistic careers over a 40-year span and the major factors that contributed to success and failures.

Judging the value of a piece of art is tricky, as the [researchers](#) note. They highlight the difficulty by pointing out that a painting called "The Man with the Golden Helmet" by Rembrandt was once the pride of Berlin—until experts discovered that it was not actually painted by Rembrandt. Suddenly, it lost most of its value, even though the painting had not changed. The reason: history and context. For many, the value of art is more than just the value of a single piece—it is about a body of work by individuals believed to have talent. And it might also have a little to do with luck and access. In this new effort, the researchers looked at the careers of 31,794 artists who were good enough to have had at least 10 exhibitions of their work during the years from 1950 to 1990, and compared how they fared against each other.

The researchers had an inkling that access to prestigious institutions like New York's Museum of Modern Art or the Guggenheim might have an impact on an [artist's career](#). To see if this might be the case, they looked at the success rates of artists (using the app Magnus) who managed to score exhibitions within the exclusive network of prestigious institutions and the impact it had on their careers.



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The researchers found that initial [success](#) with prestigious institutions offered a major boost to an artistic career. Those artists who managed to arrange several showings within the prestigious network at the beginning of their careers were far more likely to continue exhibiting later in life. In sharp contrast, those who failed to find a footing in the prestigious network during their initial showings tended to have much less prestigious careers—and many more of them dropped out of the scene altogether.

The researchers suggest it might be time for the art world to set up a blind lottery system when choosing which pieces to exhibit, forcing participants to judge work on merit alone.

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