

**THE EMERGENCE OF PRACTICE:  
MOTIVATION AND DECISION MAKING AMONG  
CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ARTISTS**

**NINA DIMITRIADI**

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## Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any materials already submitted for a degree.

Signed     Nina Dimitriadi

Dated      May 2009

## Abstract

The art world has been analysed from many different points-of-view – historical, aesthetic, economic, cultural, and political – but the social and personal aspects and, especially the factors that motivate artists to make art have been overlooked in contemporary academic studies. Given the increased prominence that visual artists, curators, galleries, and even gallery directors have achieved in recent years, this is surprising. Apart from the widespread public attention given to artists, we must also now recognise the increasing competition and complexity involved in becoming an artist. In addition to the need for talent and the requisite skills, artists also must know how best to market their work, how to display their work to its greatest advantage, how to network and build contacts in established art worlds and markets, and how to develop business acumen, in order to achieve any degree of professional success. This research study investigates motives common to many visual artists and not only examines the strategies they adopt to develop their careers but also looks at the outcomes, while at the same time reflecting on the complexities of being a visual artist today. A range of practice-based case studies, combined with interviews conducted with recently graduated and established artists based in UK and the USA are analysed with reference to the pre-existing research literature, with the intention of offering a comprehensive picture of how the contemporary visual artist's practice emerges, and why artists become *artists*.

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## Case Studies

The DVD films about each of the six case studies are attached to this thesis in order to provide visual evidence and information about their installation, display and presentation. These are referenced in the text of this thesis in the following manner, for example: (DVD film, Case study 1).

The following case studies are referenced in this thesis:

### Case study 1. *The Flight* (2003)

Case study 1 *The Flight* (2003) examines the nature of self-employed visual artists' practice at a publicly subsidised international art festival.



17 min DVD film about Case study 1- the large-scale installation, *The Flight* (2003), created by Nina 11 Dimitriadi for the Kaohsiung International Container Arts Festival, Taiwan

### Case study 2. *Eye Dreams* (2004)

Case study 2 *Eye Dreams* (2004) is an enquiry into the production of an independent exhibition by a self-managed artist. It analyses the skills, knowledge and resources required from the exhibiting artist to manage an exhibition.



17 min DVD film about Case study 2- *Eye Dreams* (2004), a solo exhibition of artwork by Zeyno Dagli curated and directed by Nina 11 Dimitriadi in Menier Gallery, London

### Case study 3. *The Exhausted Body* (2005)

Case study 3 *The Exhausted Body* (2005) researches the conditions of collaboration between established and earlier career artists exhibiting in a publicly funded museum.



30 min DVD film about Case study 3- *The Exhausted Body* (2005), an exhibition of 10 international artists at a publicly subsidised museum in Taiwan, curated and including works by Nina 11 Dimitriadi.

### Case study 4. *Return to Beslan* (2005-7)

Case study 4 *Return to Beslan* (2005-7) explores the moral and ethical issues of applying sensationalism in contemporary artist's productions.



8 min DVD film about Case study 4- *Return to Beslan* (2005-7) concerning the morality and ethics of incorporating human tragedy into the work of art. It features a series of photographs produced by Nina11 Dimitriadi along with a



supporting documentary film about the 2004 terrorist act in Beslan, Russia exhibited in North Cyprus, Taiwan and Russia.

### Case study 5. *Self-Portrait (2003-8)*

Case study 5 *Self-Portrait (2003-8)* consists of a series of commercially orientated portraits that explore the production, distribution and pricing mechanisms available for an artist immediately after his/her postgraduate art education.



5 min DVD film about Case study 5- *Self-portrait (2003-2008)* visualising the production of the series of commercially orientated portraits created by Nina11 Dimitriadi 2003-2008, which have been exhibited in London, Paris and in outer space on Sprite-Sat developed by Tohoku University, Japan.

### Case study 6. *Why are you an artist? (2006-8)*

Case study 6 *Why are you an artist? (2006-8)*

is an exhibition concept that combines a video of 22 artists' responses to the questions: Why are you an artist? and How do you define art? along with a single artwork created by each artist.



30 min DVD film extract of two questions: ‘Why are you an artist? and How do you define art?’ from 22 video interviews with artists from the U.K. and U.S.A.

A CD with additional documentation of the case studies attached to this thesis is referenced in the following manner, for example: (CD, Additional materials, Case study 2). The CD consists of each of the case studies files subsequently divided into additional files. For example, the exhibition catalogue of *The Exhausted Body (2005)* exhibition is referred in the text as: (CD, Additional materials, Case study 3, Catalogue, page number).

## Interviews: an explanatory note

This research incorporates many quotations from the interviews with established and early career artists. To make it easier to decode the professional specification of the artists, I provide an *Interview Codebook*, which not only explains the coding system but also lists all of the respondents according their location and professional status.

In cases where the quotation is extracted from the interview a reference code will indicate [I], and from the questionnaire [Q]. For example, artist name and his/her research number:

Beverly Pepper - [BP1]

Ed McGowin - [EMG2]

Age: For example, [46] but in case the artist did not want to state his/her age –  
[NoAge]

Gender: Female - [F] and Male - [M], but in case the artist did not want to state his/her gender - [NoGen]

Predominant media that visual artists use in their works:

Sculptor - [Scu]

Painter - [Pnt]

Drawing - [Draw]

Photographer - [Fot]

Film - [Fil]

Mix Media - [Mix]

Researcher - [Res]

Craft - [Craf]

Other - [Oth]

Professional status:

Student - [Stu]

Full-time Professional - [Pro]

Part-time job - [Extra]

Country of nationality/residency by, first, country of birth, and, second, work location:

UK - [UK]

USA - [US]

UK/Turkey - [UK/Tur]

Iran/USA - [IR/US]

US/Italy - [US/Ita]

Greece/UK - [GR/UK]

Cuba/US - [Cu/US]

But in cases where the artist did not want to state his/her country of origin - [NoNatn]

6 US students:

Liliana Perez - [LP17][48][F][Pnt][Stu][Cub/US]

Morgan Sieben Frew - [MF18][28][M][Pnt][Stu][US]

Breanne Duffy - [BD19][25][F][Mix][Stu][US]

Jodie Niss - [JN20][26][F][Pnt][Stu][US]

Mary Frances Cook - [MC21][24][F][Pnt][Stu][US]

Tony Ingrisano - [TI22][27][M][Draw][Stu][US]

#### 6 UK students and researchers:

Daniella Norton - [DN8][31][F][Pnt][Stu][UK]

Andrea Slater - [AS9][37][F][Fil][Stu][UK]

Huw Bartlett - [HB12][25][M][Mix][Stu][UK]

Paige Perkins - [PP16][47][F][Mix][Stu][US/UK]

Zeyno Dagli - [ZD14][34][F][Mix][Res][Tur/UK]

Nina11 [N11][32][F][Mix][Res][NoNatn]

#### 5 US established artists:

Beverly Pepper - [BP1][84][F][Scu][Pro][US/Ita]

Ed McGowin - [EMG2][69][M][Mix][Pro][US]

Craig Fisher - [CF10][55][M][Pnt][Pro][US]

Raha Raissnia - [RR5][38][F][Pnt][Pro][IR/US]

Aaron Yassin - [AY7][35][M][Mix][Pro][US]

#### 5 UK established artists:

Neale Worley - [NW6][44][M][Pnt][Pro][UK]

Allan Jenkins - [AJ4][37][M][fot][Pro][UK]

immi - [IM15][NoAge][NoGen][Pnt][Extra][NoNatn]

Emi Avora - [EA3][28][F][Pnt][Extra][GR/UK]

Graham Garrick - [GG13][33][M][Pnt][Extra][UK]

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The ground-breaking research found in Dr. Spyros Sifakakis' Ph.D. study of arts organizations *Constructing Art: Value and Practice in a Leading Contemporary Gallery* (2004) provided me with an indispensable resource.

I am also very grateful for the inspiration of my previous supervisor Dr. Chris Mullen and my colleague Dr. Yung-Hsien Chen, and their assistance with initiating this research study, and to Dr. Stefano Perlusz whose work on risk-assessment persuaded me to continue my academic studies in the UK.

I am indebted to Asif Huq, vice-president at Jeffries International Limited, for his generous financial support of this research between 2003-2007 and for his many extremely helpful comments, his assistance with proof reading and editing during this period, and also to my friend and colleague Gillian Trethowan for editing this thesis.

And a warm thank you also goes to Dr. Zeyno Dagli with whom for the past 10 years I have shared not just the pleasurable aspects of a postgraduate arts education, but also

the setbacks we both faced while undertaking practice-based research that was beset with administrative and managerial difficulties.

And finally heartfelt thanks go to my husband and my colleague Aaron Yassin, whose hard work has provided the funding necessary to complete the last two years of research, and for his loyal support throughout this process. I met Aaron while I was exhibiting my first case study *The Flight (2003)* at the Kaohsiung Container Arts Festival where he was representing artists from the USA. His extensive network, together with his compendious knowledge of the contemporary American art scene gave me a much deeper understanding of the position of the artist within the contemporary American art market, all of which became a vital component of this research.

I am, of course, indebted to all the artists I interviewed for the research who are listed below, who so generously gave me their time and shared their thoughts and insights with me, and to both Jennifer Riley and Aaron Yassin for helping to find MFA students studying at Pratt Institute to interview, and to Andrea Slater for recommending some MFA students at Brighton University.

Beverly Pepper

Ed McGowin

Emi Avora

Allan Jenkins

Raha Raissnia

Neale Worley

Aaron Yassin

Daniella Norton  
Andrea Slater  
Craig Fisher  
Huw Bartlett  
Graham Garrick  
Zeyno Dagli  
immi  
Paige Perkins  
Liliana Perez  
Morgan Sieben Frew  
Breanne Duffy  
Jodie Niss  
Mary Frances Cook  
Tony Ingrisano

Many people helped, supported, and advised me in the course of my work on the case studies in this research and I have acknowledged all their kind efforts and help at the conclusion of each study's explanatory film included on the DVDs that accompanies them.



This Thesis is dedicated to my grandfather Rostislav Maximilianovich Vielrose (1923-1994), father Sergey Konstantinovich Dimitriadi, father in-law Robert A. Yassin, and to Sifu Paul Koh.

## Chapter 1. The emergence of artists' practice: conditions and influences

*'They have something of which they are proud. What is it that makes them proud? They called it culture; it distinguishes them from the goatherds'*

*(Nietzsche, [1916]1995, p.45)*

In this thesis I have researched the practice of contemporary self-employed visual artists using my personal experiences. Drawing on six practice-based case studies I reflected on artists' roles: as artist-creator, artist-curator, artist-self-manager and artist-scholar, working in an international context. As well as reflecting on my own experience and practice I also carried out extensive field work research in public and private arts organisations. This was done in two phases and two sites- the UK and the US. In interviews with artists, both established and emerging, I posed questions concerning their external and internal motivations to become an artist, and the roles they must fulfill in order to consolidate their professional practice and artistic identity. These questions formed the qualitative research based on semi-structured video interviews. In addition to the qualitative research, questionnaires provided this study with primary data on the wider artistic population working in the UK and US. To place this material in the context of art education I also examined the curricula of a number of leading art schools and colleges both here and in US.

Critical reflection and analysis of the practice-based case studies and qualitative data collected was separated into two modes: 1) a visual component with an explanatory analysis of practical experience, and 2) philosophical analysis in the context of sociological and cultural studies of artists. The first part was mostly visualised through documentary films and the visual materials supporting each case

study and attached with this thesis (DVD films, Case Studies 1-6) as well as a CD with Additional materials for the case studies 1-6 is attached (CD, Additional materials, Case studies 1-6) supporting my practical work and explaining the origin of my practice and motivation as artist. The second is a study of the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of the wider population of surveyed artists positioned in the broad context of the social and economic framework within which they operate (DVD film, Case Study 6; CD, Additional materials, Case study 6). The outcomes, of both practice and research, identified irrationality in artists' decision-making mechanisms in their pursuit of an artistic career. For example, most of the artists interviewed described how they instinctively chose a professional path that is similar to vocation, rather than more straightforward employment. Moreover, despite art being their vocation, there was a lack of common ground amongst these artists regarding a definition of 'art', and this has the effect of adding to the confusion surrounding the idea of art as a professional career in today's consumer society.

Any capitalist or even socialist society operates on the exchange of work for financial or other types of reward. The income derived remunerates the employee or the self-employed with sufficient funding to cover, at least, the most basic expenses for food and shelter. However, in contemporary consumer society Erickson (2009, p.119) explains three different motivations for people to do work: extrinsic, intrinsic and authority. Extrinsic is the motivation of pursuing certain work from outside conditions, intrinsic results from an inner personal satisfaction from the job, and authority is when one wants to rise above other's employment positions, or on the contrary be dominated by other employees or members of society within which he/she works (Erickson, 2009, p.122; Berg, 1978).

Nevertheless, the motivation to be a self-employed visual artist, especially at the beginning of one's career, is not adequately researched or assessed in academic studies.

I believe this is due to the following: a) the conditions and influences surrounding artists' practice are not clearly identified; b) the artist's inner motivations to follow an artistic career are not investigated and are often based upon 'myths or conventions' (Becker, 1982; Abbing, 2002; Bain, 2005); c) the artists themselves do not have an interest in being academically researched (Bourdieu, 1993).

In this research I aim to identify, clarify, and explain the basic motivation of artists to produce, deliver, and continue working as self-employed visual artists in contemporary capitalist society. The reason to study artists' motivation arises from my personal experience in which I identified a series of inadequacies while working as a self-employed visual artist. I saw that there was no sufficient visual artist production wage structure or other non-financial reward that can allow artists to sustain or survive in their practice from producing art. Moreover, many scholars mention artists' irrational or eccentric behavior, which often results in difficulties in employment situations, or when collaborating in non-art professional fields (Becker, 1982; Frey, 2003; Abbing, 2002). This behavior can also be substituted for professionalism while working with personnel, management, and administration of their own production. This condition results in the widespread perception: that 'artistic labor is seldom recognized as 'real' work' (Bain, 2005, p.25). By 'real work' we can infer that Bain means 'work central to the way that value and status are assigned in our society: it is important to the individual's identity, to how they make sense of themselves in the world around them' (Erickson, 2009, p.117).

Frequently individuals who produce artwork which has been financed by their own resources 'never realize any money from their work and fail to support further work on the proceeds received from what they have already done' (Becker, 1982, p.93), something I can attest to from my own experience. It therefore becomes necessary for artists to take any available art related or non-art related employment that provides

them with a regular salary, or, as myself, to seek the support from family and friends in order to meet daily expenses. All of the artists interviewed for this study were ready to continue their work as artists with no clear expectation of funds from the sale of their artworks, even when they had experienced success in the past, as in this example:

‘I think I can talk about the few people around me that are still alive and doing this. I don’t think anyone ever expected to live off of making art; it never occurred to us. In fact, I wrote a cookbook to be able to support myself, because I didn’t want to do any other kind of work.’

(Interview Codebook [I][BP1][85][F][Scu][Pro][US/Ita])

Most of the artists interviewed are practicing their art in a parallel mode with other professional employment, which provided them with a stable salary in comparison with their visual art occupation. This ‘dual employment pattern’ affects artist’s personal lives, as artistic production does not have the same time schedule and financial structure for the practitioner in comparison with other professions. As a result, many artists experience irregularity in their working hours and also are burdened by the requirements of personal financial investment in their artwork and in addition are personally self-absorbed, which is often seen as artistic egotism by their families, as these examples show:

‘... I don’t make money from my art. Being an artist isn’t like having an other job. People find hard to understand my work ethics’.

(Appendices, Questionnaire sample  
[Q 16][JN20][26][F][Pnt][Stu][US])

‘[I’m], always working. The 9-5 does not exist 24/7/365(+1 leap year).’

(Appendices, Questionnaire sample  
[Q16][HB12][25][M][Mix][Stu][UK])

‘I just had a relationship end because of the time I spend in my studio.’

(Appendices, Questionnaire sample  
[Q16][TI22][27][M][Draw][Stu][US])

‘Intense preoccupation with artistic matters can cause feelings of resentment within the family: they can feel shut out sometimes so it is important to give the time they need. Fundamentally my husband views art practice as a selfish act, nevertheless he is supportive.’

(Appendices, Questionnaire sample  
[Q 16][PP16][47][F][Mix][Stu][US/UK])

Why, in such cases, do artists continue to pursue a career that appears not to provide them with enough money to survive on for any reasonable length of time and which also causes family problems? One might suggest that the answer to this question depends largely on the individual artist’s personal circumstances. For example, some can find or have access to financial backing to practice, with no returns from their art production, but then do not have enough money to support a family for an unspecified period of time. For others, they seek alternative jobs in order to continue working as an artist and support their family, which triples their work (art work, paid job, and family responsibilities). One could also suggest that, firstly, it may be because the artists, especially at a younger age, tend to take more risks (Abbing, 2002; Filer 1986, p.57; Robertson, 2005) which in quantitative surveys indicates they drop out from the artistic profession when they reach middle age (Filer, 1986) or because we are generally living

in a 'risk society' (Beck 1992, 1986) we enjoy a measure of self-deception. For example, according to Tom Wolfe (1975, pp.12-13), an artist might believe 'that all that matters was that *he* knew his work was great... and that other artists respect it... and that History would surely record his achievements...but deep down he knew he was lying to himself.' This is because the artist *knows* that selling their work can provide them with wages or income to sustain their future work, and also this wage or income from selling the artwork provides self-esteem and 'proves to self and others that art is an occupation, and not a vocation' (McCall, 1978, p.307).

There is a theory that the possibility of high rewards attracts risk-seeking people to artists' careers (Filer, 1986, p.57; Santos, 1976). I believe that risk-taking attitudes are much more prevalent in the younger age group, and are reduced in the older age group, and Filer (*ibid*) suggests that this may be why artists are proportionally younger as a group than other types of workers. In my experience risk-taking is a feature of the artist's personality as 14 out of 22 artists interviewed for this research (established artists or recent MFA graduates) indicated that they did not expect to generate sufficient income to subsist from their art practice, and all of those surveyed stated they would continue to practice even if they did not achieve a sufficient income for 10 years or longer). According to my own experience, as age progresses, when energy is expended on work (travelling, relocating, heavy lifting, poor or bad condition of life) that is not rewarded with an adequate income, the work becomes increasingly untenable especially when a regular income is necessary to support one's family. This condition, I believe, is responsible for the fact that a larger proportion of artists are in a younger age group, than in other labour sectors (Filer, 1986, pp.63,73).

Even in cases when an artist receives a substantial salary, the vast majority of artists interviewed for this research indicated that the irregularity of this financial reward could undermine an artist's family life (Appendices, Questionnaire sample [Q

16]). Moreover, the work of the visual artist, and especially the self-employed artist, frequently involves a considerable amount of travelling and domestic upheaval in order to set up and promote exhibitions, and make sales, all of which are easier to accomplish when you are younger, single, and have more energy. Therefore while I agree that risk-taking is a key factor in the way that an artist functions, this may not necessarily include a *risk-seeking* factor, and with age the artist may even develop a tendency to be *risk-averse*.

A second explanation sees the artists' career as a vocational choice, where the artist feels compelled to follow a particular 'calling'. In a research study on scientists working in scientific organisations Mark Erickson (2002) identified that a large percentage of the scientists interviewed pursued their career as a vocation rather than focusing primarily on the financial reward it would bring them. In his study Erickson (2002) appropriately quotes Max Weber (1948, p.129-158):

'...In the field of science only he who is devoted solely to the work at hand has 'personality'. And this holds not only for the field of science: we know of no great artist who has ever done anything but to serve his work and only his work.'

(Weber, 1948, p.137 cited in Erickson, 2002, p.15)

From an historical perspective Arnold Hauser (1982) argues that artists 'must have formed a personal union with priest and the medicine man' (Hauser, 1982, p.243) through their ability to influence human reality, and that 'the connection between artistic talent and charismatic authority must have grown closer without its ever being completely dissolved' (Hauser, 1982, p.244). Nevertheless, similarities in the motivation and commitment of artists, scientists, or priests to their professional path as



a vocation is not an indication of similarity in the external conditions within which each group operates. In the case of the group that Erickson (2002) researched, all of the scientists were in employment and working for institutions, whereas all the artists I interviewed, whether early-career or established, were self-employed or had just finalised their art education, or worked in other jobs in order to sustain their artistic practice (Appendices, Questionnaire sample [Q 11]). Alison Bain (2005) argues that the occupational instability of artists who embark on a career path that is essentially unstructured, combined with the lack of availability of work placement for artists who have recently graduated, generally has a negative effect on artists' decision making and motivation, and on artists' self-image (Bain, 2005). These external conditions are not the same as those faced by scientists or priests who are often employed by institutions that most likely have a well-established management structure, and so therefore the professional conditions of visual artists need to be studied separately.

It became apparent to me that some problems arose from the fact that (as most of the artists I interviewed and from my practical research via the case studies showed) artists were not furnished with an adequate knowledge of the artist's career ladder or the art market's operation mechanisms, nor of the communication or managerial skills necessary in order to make effective approaches to that market. Moreover, I also want to point out that not only is there significant neglect of these subjects by the art institutions who teach artists, but also the artists themselves do not try to obtain this knowledge from elsewhere. Both early career and professional artists identified this issue:

Aaron: There was one class (in professional management) but I did not take it.

Nina: Explain why?

Aaron: I didn't think the issues being taught were significant enough.

Nina: Why do you think it has happened that, in case it is a very important component of the artist establishment – why the art school does not teach it as a major subject?

Jodi: The business side, do you mean? ...because it's really not that complicated, I think. I don't think it's really that complicated. In undergraduate school it was taught to me in a professional practice class, and we actually did all the things that we had to do: We sent out the applications, we talked to the right people, and we didn't spend money on books, because we spent lots of money on various things, and it's not really what you need, to be an artist, it's what you need to be a professional artist, in New York. (...) going to art school is not about the business. I think it's really about learning, and if you really want to learn you can learn it in probably an hour, if you really need to. It's in a book. It's there. It's just like anything else, and I wouldn't want to sit in a class about how to talk to people (laughs) and how to go to walk to the gallery and say, "Hey, can you look at my work?" Really, that's not what I'm here to do. I'm here to learn about how to make my work better because if my work's better, and I can speak better about my work then hopefully that's what I really need.

This quote from the interview indicates this student considers that professional management skills for an artist are easy to obtain, however I discovered that 86% of the interviewed artists were not able to even join in a basic discussion (let alone provide an explanation) around the question 'How does the art market here or elsewhere operate?'

On the other hand, I will agree that information about marketing your art work, for example for commercial artists such as graphic designers, is widely available in the central bookstores of cities with leading art markets such as London and New York, but in my experience there is no overall course for artists' career development that covers the reality of self-employed visual artists' practice other than the recommendation of distributing CVs or application forms to residency programs. I believe this is the result not only of structural differences in the art market for commercial designers, but that it is also due to the secretive nature of visual art markets operating in the commercial and public sectors (Sifakakis, 2002; Wolff, 1982, pp.19-26) which is discussed in Chapter 3/III.

However, artists need not care about financial and managerial issues if they receive additional financial support that is unrelated to the art they produce. An artist's tuition fee might be paid from elsewhere, and they can then take an additional part-time job so that they can concentrate on studying how to create rather than distribute their craft. For example 90% of the artists I interviewed were subsidised by their parents during their education and/or took out loans for their graduate degrees (Appendices, Questionnaire sample [Q 14; 15; 15/1]), which in my experience one can obtain through banks with a guarantor support signature. In order to pay for one year of the two-year Masters of Fine Art degree program at the Pratt Institute in New York (one of the most prestigious art colleges in US) a student will need to find approximately US\$30,000 per annum to pay for the fees (and this sum does not include living expenses and the cost of materials). According to MFA graduate Mary Cook she paid \$70,000 per annum including tuition fees and living expenses (Appendices, Questionnaire sample [Q 23][MC21][24][F][Pnt][Stu][US]). Art students often therefore face the serious potential threat of neither being able to generate enough money to cover the requisite investment in their education, nor can they generate

sufficient income to meet their subsistence costs, on a daily basis, for an indefinite period of time. It comes as no surprise that most of them indicated their readiness to take part-time jobs that are not necessarily art related, if they didn't already have them (Appendices, Questionnaire sample [Q 10]; Bain, 2005, pp.39-41). And in my own experience, artists who did not care about the business side of the artist's life were from well-to-do families who could afford not to care about distribution of their work to support their living expenses. Thus it was not a surprise to me that many of the artists I interviewed felt uncomfortable when discussing their expenditure/income or the financial support they received during their education or establishment, in comparison with the artists who did not have any support during their education and who proudly spoke about their poverty and their struggle. Moreover, many of the artists I worked with that had achieved commercial success were those who came from well-endowed families that had provided them with financial and emotional support, and/or had the time to attend gallery openings, and would provide contacts and initiate commissions and purchases of their work.

At this point it can be said that the position of the artist in contemporary consumer society is similar to the vocational path or the career development and motivation of scientists and religious workers. However, I will argue that because of a lack of structure in the art market, the lack of job security for self-employed visual artists, and the necessity for self-financing at the beginning of artists' self-employment, artists' professional practice is fraught with hazards that frequently impact on their personal motivation, their decision-making, their self-image, and their personal life in general. My interview with the artist immi illustrates part of this argument:

Nina: So how do you think the occupation of the artist differs from other professions?

immi: I think it differs because first of all it is not necessary for anybody to have the Art, and I think it is different because it is psychologically very dangerous profession for somebody, and not just psychologically I think, I have seen many artists – very intelligent people who have completely ruined their life by being an artist.

Nina: How did they do it? Something happened to them, or they spent too much effort, or they have no money back? What type of ruin?

immi: They...they devote their life to being an artist and in return they get absolutely nothing.

Nina: And they have been good artists?

immi: They might be good artists, yes.

Nina: So you think it's a dangerous profession?

immi: I think it's very dangerous.

Nina: Is it dangerous for you?

immi: I think for me, yes of course it has been a problem, yes.

Nina: So you are afraid it can be a problem in the future?

immi: Like I say I sometimes, I am trying to stop being an artist.

Nina: So if you wish...you would stop.

immi: Sometimes I have stopped, and then I find that I am starting again.

(Interview Codebook [I][IM15][NoAge][NoGen][Pnt][Extra][NoNatn])

immi's dilemma can be viewed in the following way – even if he understood the danger of the artists' occupation which he describes as the investment of one's life and resources to sustain a career as an artist and then, literally, not getting anything in return, and furthermore his inability to cease being an artist, which requires him to stop painting his paintings and exhibiting them and promoting them via the press, catalogues

- all of this indicates a personal inner (intrinsic) condition, of pursuing an artistic vocation? not for financial or other extrinsic reward, but rather that he simply can't stop doing it because he believes that he expresses himself via his art (Interview Codebook [I][IM15][NoAge][NoGen][Pnt][Extra][NoNatn]). He devised his nickname and he does not reveal his real identity, and for a long period of time he did not disclose his gender either. He believes that the art market judges an artist's work using these criteria - as much as on the quality and content of their artwork (Dimitriadi, 2004).

In this basic outline of the internal and external factors that impact on a visual artist's career I have attempted to explain the seriousness of the conditions that affect artists, personally and professionally. Nevertheless, despite these conditions, they continue to carry on practicing within the visual art world. My next step is to outline artists' personal perceptions of what they do. In addition, I look at definitions of art from the perspective of art related fields and from the artists themselves. This, I believe, can deepen our understanding of the conditions the artist experiences within the art world.

For example, my own motivation to create art or to express myself through an artistic craft cannot simply be explained as an outcome of the social conditions in which I was brought up. In ways similar to those of the artists immi, Andrea Slater, and Morgan Frew, whom I interviewed, I tried to pursue regular employment outside my art practice, but no matter how financially advantageous that regular employment was, the creative process integral to the process of making art held me in its thrall. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century Giorgio Vasari, in his *Life of the Artists* ([1550] 1991). describes how artists pursued their profession in spite of other career opportunities that became available to them through their family connections, or as a result of the particular skills they had acquired. I believe that such situations cannot simply be ascribed to the artist's social conditions or to influences that might result in the production of art or

their professional decision-making, as explained further in Chapter 4/I.

Perhaps McNiff's (1977) account of the psychological motivation of artists provides a more useful explanation. In his study of a broad population of mixed-media artists he found a range of psychological motives which related more closely to patterns in the individual artist's personality and social background (and perhaps- psychology) rather than to their social background.

However, even where psychologically-based motivations may appear to prevail, Janet Wolff's (1993) sociological point of view that art is a societal production, rather than a creation of superior minds, can be of value and should also be considered, but in doing so it needs to be re-examined with reference to contemporary changes in the art world and artists conditions, including the increase in the sheer number of artists, commercialization, changes in art education, the economy, etc. For example in Vasari's story about the childhood of Giotto, the Florentine painter, sculptor, and architect, in which he was 'led on by his natural inclination towards the art of drawing, would continually sketch something from the world of nature or something that he had imagined upon flat stones or upon the ground', and when Cimabue, another famous artist, saw him doing this, he took the boy to work with him as his apprentice (Vasari, [1550] 1991, p.16). From a sociological standpoint, such a romantic anecdote might be interpreted as: 'the boy had access to drawing materials and the time available to practice his drawing from the early age, and was born in a part of the country which at the time provided numerous opportunities to find an education in fine arts and to practice it, even though the student came from a less advantageous economic background than the artist who picked him up'. The economic background is an important consideration for the artist not only nowadays but also in 16<sup>th</sup> century Italy, as the lives of many of Vasari's artists demonstrate, for the production of arts and craft and also literature, and for artists mobility, since it allowed them opportunities to travel

between different locations and abroad to compete for and to secure potential commissions. Therefore, I believe that when considering a definition of art and artists both the ‘romantic’ approach and sociological approach to artists’ personal conditions should be considered when studying artists’ decision-making processes. Also, the need to consider the new terminology defining art and art related labor should be discussed and paid attention too rather than left to be defined by the stakeholders as ‘whatever we want it to be’.

## I. A diverse definition of art, or why there is no consensus on what art is

In the USSR, under the Soviet regime, the terms ‘visual art’ and ‘artist’ were precisely defined and difficult to argue about. The word for ‘Art’ in the Russian language is *Iskusstvo*, which can be translated as ‘high skill’; the term ‘visual art’ is *Izobrazitel’noe iskusstvo*, which means ‘visually representing high skill’. These definitions were present in visual artists’ training in the different media, or were promoted in the curricula, for example in painting, drawing, composition as ‘fine arts’, and metal, textile and wood craftsmanship as ‘applied arts or crafts’. And then these skills were also applied to the context of the artwork or craft, denoted in the word *Izobrazhenie*, which means ‘an appearance or representation’. A badly executed painting by the art student, which may contain good composition and ideas but has a low quality of production skills applied to it, was marked accordingly. This meant that such a student might receive a high score or mark for composition, but a low score for their skills. This is similar to art historian Roger De Piles’ ([1699] 1743) way of evaluating famous artists’ works in his book *The Lives of Painters, The Idea of the Perfect Painter*. The categories Piles used when assessing artistic excellence were composition, drawing,



color and expression. He explained, 'By expression, I meant not the character of any particular object, but the general thought or the understanding' (Holt, 1958, p.184).

In 1999, on my arrival in the UK, at Goldsmiths College in London, and subsequently at London's City University, Arts Management Department, I discovered that contemporary artists in Britain experienced a diversity of practice forbidden in USSR and that they experimented with new art media and techniques often referred to as 'postmodern'. According to the postmodern theory taught to artists at Goldsmiths there were no limitations to expression or techniques, which always can be an experiment, or as The Routledge Critical Dictionary of Postmodern Thought calls it, 'Neo-geo' (Sim, 1999, p.89).

As a result, I came to realise that the original meaning of the word art, as I understood it, was lost or transferred in whatever way was possible, while artists experimented, played around or tried to find new ways for expression via visual art. However, such transformation did not include any consideration about renaming the cultural form that was called 'art', but rather there was an extra word added: *conceptual*. In this new 'conceptual art' the concept was privileged over and above of any skill that may be required to produce it. Stallabrass's (2005) discourse on contemporary British art expressed his point of view that artists, despite their innovative art, were partly exploited and started to disappear from the 'contemporary art scene' as soon as they exhausted their fashionable existence in art market and only a few manage to remain highly paid artists, despite Tracy Emin's dissatisfaction with institutional sexism in art, where prices for her works are lower than her contemporary male colleagues (The Independent, 2006).

Recent coinages around the word *art*, for example Conceptual-art, Text-based-art, Street-art, Outsider-art, Web-art and new hybrid forms of *art* are adding to the confusion surrounding the shifting definitions of art, and its basic old-fashioned

meaning. This often results in the reinterpretation of the traditional meaning of the word *art* discussed above as a craft or skillful ability to create. This discussion continues in Chapter 4/II and explains the artists' perspective on defining art as a profession and as a production.

The art economist Bruno S. Frey (2003, p.19) has commented that the general lack of consensus regarding a definition of 'Art' makes it difficult not only for an economist to study the arts, but this situation creates further confusion for other professions working within the arts sector. Indeed, many attempts to formulate definitions of art have resulted in 'explanations' that are unsatisfactory because they are either diffuse or characteristically vague. The definition of art now serves the diverse needs of stakeholders in the arts. For some artists I interviewed, art means 'feeling' or 'inspiration' or a 'form of expression':

'Well art for me, the art I look at is important to give me a sense of being alive...'

(Interview Codebook [I][BP1][85][F][Scu][Pro][US/Ita])

'It's something that comes through inspiration...'

(Interview Codebook [I][RR5][38][F][Pnt][Pro][IR/US])

'It is just a form of expression'

(Interview Codebook [I][NW6][44][M][Pnt][Pro][UK])

For other artists art means a creative or cultural product:

‘Well, I sort of have a traditional point-of-view on it I guess, and basically Art to me is painting, drawing, and sculpture, erm...and that’s sort of where it stops (laughs)....’

(Interview Codebook [I][MF18][28][M][Pnt][Stu][US])

‘Art is a cultural product that serves no other function than...an aesthetic function. It requires certain skills to produce’.

(Interview Codebook [I][AY7][35][M][Mix][Pro][US])

For many, art is whatever you want to call it, or else the artist simply refuses to define it:

‘Anything that your mind can be...anything that can change someone’s point of view, I guess, or allow them to see something that they can’t see without it...that’s really.... that’s a wide variety of anything, really, that just allows someone to see something different or feel something different, even if it’s a horrible feeling (laughs)...or a great feeling’.

(Interview Codebook [I][JN20][26][F][Pnt][Stu][US])

‘Oh! I mean it can be anything really. I choose painting. Well, I guess I’d say art is defined by how one makes an object or a thing credible’

(Interview Codebook [I][MC21][24][F][Pnt][Stu][US])

‘Oh!...I don’t know. How do you ...that’s a...that’s a crazy...that’s a good question, right. But you can never answer it....’

(Interview Codebook [I][TI22][27][M][Draw][Stu][US])

And many said that art is defined by contemporary art institutions, for example:

‘I think art is defined by the institutions that surround it really. Art exists anywhere, but its how you... the world sees art that defines it...’

(Interview Codebook [I][HB12][25][M][Mix][Stu][UK])

It appears that no single clear definition of art exists (Sifakakis, 2004, p.11; Stallabrass, 2006, pp.2-3; Abbing, 2002, pp.18-20) nor is there a widely accepted definition of what constitutes artists’ practice and the work artists produce (Frey and Pommerehne, 1989a). The word ‘Art’ serves the wide-ranging needs of diverse art disciplines, art institutions and state funding bodies, as well as influential individuals, as discussed in Chapter 1/ I, II; Chapter 4/ II; Chapter 5/ III).

The association of the word ‘Art’ by the interviewed artists with a lifestyle, or a vocation, or with certain feelings is similar to Janet Wolff’s (1993) Marxist idea that it is a part of human nature (distinguishing us from animals, for example) to be creative and thus every human has the potential to be creative. Thus, she does not believe in the romantic notion of art produced by the ‘genius artists in isolation’. Her view that art is a societal production, rather than a creation of superior minds, defines art as a cultural product that consists ‘of economic, social and ideological factors, mediated through the formal structures of the text (literary or other), and owing its existence to the particular practice of the located individual’ (Wolff, 1993, p.139). By placing emphasis on the word ‘production’ rather than ‘creation’ (Macherey, 1978a, p.78) and on the terms ‘cultural or artistic product’ instead of ‘work of art’ (Wolff, 1993, p.138) she does not eliminate mystical or romantic notions widely attributed to the words ‘art’ and ‘creativity’ but rather emphasises the social construction of its definition. In my experience as an artist and researcher in art, elements of both – the social construction of the definition and its romantic notion – are present in the artist’s practice, within the artist himself, and also in society.

## II. Historic and social context to public funding and definitions of art

In comparison with contemporary western art market, the USSR where I grew up and graduated as a Teacher in Fine Arts and Technical Drawing, a definition of art/artist was commonly clearly defined and understood by all the stakeholders of the visual arts. The Soviet State fully subsidised and controlled art education curricula, production and distribution, as well as provided artists with social securities, such as health care, pension, working studios, exhibition opportunities and so on. This type of generosity required that artists fulfill the states' terms and conditions, which were defined and explained: from the style, form and subject of the creation, to the quality of the production, commonly set via education sector.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, it became apparent that the elimination of the State subsidy brought diversification in the themes of expression, or as many will call it 'freedom of expression' in the concepts or subjects of artwork and artists' public behaviour/performances. This system of subsidy and control of the visual arts was no different than any other professional operation/employment condition in USSR. However, in 1991, with the collapse of the USSR, in parallel with the appearance of 'freedom of expression', the cut in state subsidy in the visual arts also eliminated public funding for arts education, artist's establishment in general. 'The Russian government is forgetting that culture is the most important thing for the nation's identity. It was known in the Soviet times, but forgotten now...My specialty was nineteenth century Russian sculpture. Now my specialty is money' said Vladimir Gusev, Director of the Russian Museum, St. Petersburg (Rosenbaum,1998, pp.45-53).

Technical production and skills and quality of artistic production, once prized in the USSR, simply became unnecessary. Overall the art sector began to decline starting with redundancy in the sector's population and following with the drop in demand/

supply in arts market in general. Artists began to manage his/her career by him/her self; they reduced the time spent for their artistic production because more time was required for self-management. This transition was, and still is, painful and the results are unclear as it is still in search of link between art and general development in the economy or State interest (Council of Europe, 1996).

Skilled craftsmanship (including both craft education and craft production) are time-consuming skills regardless of time, country of origins or political agenda of the artist. This example shows not only the importance of the state support in visual art/artists in Soviet union but also gives an example that the funding organisation often influences the terms and condition on artists and their production, which often then influences the defining mechanisms in visual arts.

However, the influence by the subsidising institution or individual on the definition of art and on profession of artist happened not only in USSR; there are many examples of the influences on artistic productions by States, wealthy individuals, and political parties and so on. One example of similar state support for art and artists is The Federal Art Project in US during the Great Depression. The Work Progress Administration (WPA) program operated from 1935-1943 supported The New Deal art projects subsidised by the American government. It produced a similar outcome (in representation and management) to the Soviet state. The primary concept of The Federal Art Project in US was to provide regular wages to the artists in need during the Great Depression, and in return, artists were commissioned to create artwork accessible to the general public (building interior, posters, outdoor sculptures, etc.) in 'socially-conscious figurative or realist manner' (Lindey, 1990, pp.29-30), which was similar to Soviets' artistic production in appearance and in function, as well as provided the artists with the income necessary to operate.

At the present time, public support in UK via the Arts Council England serves an

agenda to bring artistic experience closer to the public by distributing public and lottery funds to artistic production and its interaction with the public. Their website in March 2007 states: ‘We work to get great art to everyone by championing, developing and investing in experiences that enrich people’s lives’ (Arts Council England, 1998). However, in order to get funding for their project, artists need to fulfill the requirements of the council. In other words, an artist must fashion their proposal to fit the council’s agenda. This again is a common practice that the organization, which provides the subsidy and income for the artists’ production, applies their regulations and requirements to the artists and thus influences the artist’s production and its management within the terms and conditions of the organization. Therefore, the influence of the public or private subsidy in the arts makes artists adjust themselves into the regulations of a subsidising body in order to be able to function within the art market. Some of these issues I have explored in the case studies *The Flight (2003)*, *Eye Dreams (2004)*, *The Exhausted Body (2005)* which show that galleries can plug gaps in their schedules by using artists’ labour for free (or at minimal cost). Artists are encouraged to supply low quality work not because they cannot or do not want to produce a technically proficient, or even excellent art work, but because they are obliged to keep their own expenses to a minimum, and are often required to provide work free of charge. Here is an example of the budget provided to me during the case study *The Flight (2003)*:

**Note:**

- (1) Taiwan artist(s) of each work will receive a creation fee of NT \$50,000. Of this 15% will be deducted for tax. Expenditures on materials will be capped at NT \$150,000. Purchase receipts will be required in order to claim such expenditures.
- (2) Foreign artist(s) of each work will receive a creation fee of NT \$65,000. Of this 20% will be deducted for tax. Expenditures on materials will be capped at NT \$185,000. Purchase receipts will be required in order to claim such expenditures.
- (3) After signing the contract, the organizer will pay the artists 60% of the creation fee, and the remained 40% of the creation fee will be paid to the artists after they complete their works and the organizer finish the administrative procedures of inspection.
- (4) Any international or inland transportation expenses and costumes clearance for shipping the components of works by Taiwan and foreign artists to the exhibition site should all be included in materials expenditures. Participating artists may also find other funding sources by themselves.
- (5) The aforementioned materials expenditures include all costs of installation (including facilities for electricity, Internet, and lighting needed for the works), the visa fees and salaries of the structural technician for the works of assembled containers, insurance fees for the works during the period for the creation, assembly and removal of the containers, and technical service fees.

After reducing artist's salary by 15% for taxes and losing on the exchange of foreign currency I received a salary of US \$1,000.00 (for more than a month of full-time work), which in my opinion is a small price to receive for the amount of work the participating artists did. Such art exhibitions organised by state subsidised public or private art organisations that show work made with free labour often attract artists early in their career, so that the artists can either enhance their CVs, or experience a trial run for potentially more serious work, or simply have their work seen by the public. So the decline in craftsmanship amongst artists is related to this trend, because artists are forced to reduce the time they spend on production of their work, and this in turn has resulted in the process whereby 3D images have been transformed and flattened into 2D works that are easier and faster to produce, with a reduction in the skills required to produce the work, and also in the quality of the art work itself, so that the work's concept or idea tends to take precedence over technical skill or craft. This is a trend that has begun to reformulate a long-established process of art-making, in which highly developed skills once produced craft of great refinement, and where art was once referred to as 'high or fine skills'.

In the UK, Arts Council England (2009) whose function it is to provide financial backing and support, and to promote the British art 'scene' and British artists, has also devised its own definitions of the visual arts to support the ideas underpinning state institutions' notions of 'art' and of 'artists' - endowing the artists with professional status and recognition, in order to be able to 'legitimately' allocate funding to defined practices and practitioners. However, when I contacted the Arts Council England to obtain figures relating to the UK's artist population I was informed that no data exists on this, which puts the Arts Council England's distribution and allocation of subsidies to the arts in question:



‘Dear Nina,

Thanks for email. I’m afraid there are no statistics on how many artists live or work in the UK- mainly because there has yet to be any definition of what an artist is, or anyone willing to count them. I’d suggest contacting Arts Council England’s national office...’

(Artquest, artquest@arts.ac.uk, 2008 [email] message to N., Yassin (nina11yassin@hotmail.com). Received on 8 February 2008, 1:00:48 pm)

‘Dear Nina,

Thank you for your enquiry. Arts Council England works to get art to everyone by championing, developing and investing in artistic experiences that enrich people’s lives. Unfortunately we do not hold lists of artists; however you may find the following online resources useful (...)

(Wishart, J., Arts Council England, enquiries@artscouncil.org.uk, 2009 [email] message to N. Yassin (nina11yassin@hotmail.com). Received on 22 April 2009, 1:59:53 pm)

However difficult it may be to define ‘Art’ in a general sense for the various individual stakeholders – for example, the policy makers, politicians, and art organisations – the terms couching a definition will often depend on the specific aims and conditions each stakeholder is pursuing. Thus definitions may differ wildly, and without an in-depth study of the contexts from which the definitions have emerged it can be difficult for scholars to assess their meaning. This situation might be a feature of the ‘postmodern’ fragmentation in the field of the humanities that has become apparent in most disciplines with emergence of diverse ‘sub disciplines’. Nevertheless, I will argue that this tendency towards diversity does not affect the artist-as-

professional in a positive way simply because it requires the artist to spend additional time and resources analysing and comprehending what exactly one or the other stakeholder requires them to produce, and/or to perform, in order for the artist to adjust their understanding of what their 'art' should be, accordingly. The lack of clearly defined terms of reference in the visual arts creates obfuscation for the artist, drains his/her time, and affects the artist's motivation, and accordingly his/her production while trying to conform to the various diverse stakeholders perceptions of what art should look like and what its content should be.

Though Frey (Frey, 2003, pp.16-17) argues that this 'ill-defined' group (the Artists) have difficulty themselves when trying to decide what Art is, the self-employed artist Allan Jenkins responded to my question 'Why are you an artist?' by replying "I will not call myself an artist, I am a Fine Art Photographer. Other people call me an artist." In this response Jenkins confirmed what Alan Bowness (Bowness, 1989, pp.11-21) describes as the "first step of recognition of the artist" in modern times. As Bowness explains, the first stage of the recognition of the individual as an artist comes from the artist's own community, when that community starts to refer to him/her as an 'artist'. This suggests that not only the meaning of 'art' is constructed by stakeholders in the arts, but also the artist's public recognition as a professional.

Meanwhile in Sifakakis' study (2002, p.292), the high-status contemporary art gallery's evaluation of the art work and its allocation of the social significance to that work warns us that the 'taste, selections and interpretation of art world insiders do not have to be trusted'. According to his investigation, the evaluation of visual artwork and artists' accreditation by contemporary public and private galleries, which often involves judgment and selection by specialists, also appears to convey a rigid detachment from the public who are the artists 'audience'. Therefore there are risks involved in allowing others, such as a publicly subsidised museum for example, to call you an 'artist' or to

define your work as ‘art’, as this and other institutions’ evaluations may often not necessarily be based upon considered judgments or on the opinion of the public that these institutions have been designed to serve. Thus definitions of art, as defined by all the various stakeholders, appear to be constantly shifting according their individual preferences, and as a result there appears to be no common understanding of that we can or can’t call ‘art’, and therefore ‘artist’.

Both Sifakakis (2004) and Frey (2003, p.17) recommend that when making assessments about what art might resemble one should not depend on the opinions of arts insiders. Frey bases his assertion on what he describes as the elitism of the decision makers and “their reality of judgment”, of museums’ management structures, of the art establishment and art critics, and finally of the artists themselves (Frey, 2003, p.14).

However, many scholars and artists indicate that the definition of art is constructed by art institutions (Sifakakis, 2002; Bourdieu, 1994, p.139). In addition, Hadjinicolaou (1973, p.21) argues that it is a mistake to ‘understand the individual motivation for producing a painting is the same as understanding the painting’. In other words, personal motivations of artists must be separately researched in relation to their art product in the study of art history. He emphasises that art should not be interpreted through the history of artists’ personalities, which often is the case in studies of the history of art.

Might it be possible to count up and list the various definitions of art made by the arts stakeholders? If one attempted to do this, one might come up against the same problems faced by Frey in his attempt to make an assessment of all the different kinds of Art using criteria from economics or other art related disciplines. However, as Frey (2003, p.9) puts it, ‘each scholar has his or her basic values, even when undertaking scientific research’. Nevertheless, the hazards involved in defining art, in all its various

guises, should be examined closely from the various standpoints, and subsequently this investigation can then, usefully, be widened to include the context of the artist's point-of-view.

### III. The artists and quantitative research: a problem of generalisation

In the US and Europe quantitative research data are commonly used in studies on art and artists by researchers who apply quantitative research methods (Heilbrun and Gray, 2001; Filer, 1986; Bourdieu, 1992; Florida, 2001) when analyzing economic and demographic tendencies in the field of arts labour and production. National statistics on arts often combine studies that are quantified from a diverse range of 'arts' professions and, for example, might categorise architects with art teachers, or orchestral musicians with a multiplicity of other performing artists which are all working under different external and internal professional conditions. Very often the result is that research accumulated from such a diverse range of arts activities tends to produce vague data with outcomes that correlate with a broad estimate of the economic impact of 'arts' labour and production, since they were originally based on approximate or misleading definitions of what constitutes the professional artist's labour. Despite the fact that many of these researchers admit to such a generalisation of data, for example by combining statistics from artists practicing in profit making and nonprofit making segments of the art market (Heilbrun and Gray, 2001), they persist in researching artists' in this generalized way, by combining diverse quantitative data on artists ranging from the performing arts to fine arts sectors. This method of assessment cannot provide a reliable resource when presenting, for example, visual artists' labour data. Furthermore, the application of traditional economic studies on the art sector cannot be

applied, as the supply and demand of artworks in visual art markets does not operate according to traditional economic models (Abbing, 2002).

I will argue that these quantitative research methods are inappropriate and are of limited use in a study of the specific conditions that relate (as in my case) to those working as self-employed artists in the visual arts sector of the market. Data achieved via such methods lacks the specificity that is necessary to represent accurately artists' identity, financial condition, and other external conditions that are prevalent in this sub-sector of the arts market, and instead this data merely reflects general, overall, tendencies or in some cases provide misleading data. For example, statistics achieved via these methods that concern a performing artist working full-time in a theatre will have little in common with a self-employed visual artist, other than the fact that both of the individual artists pursue activities that are denoted as 'art', and that they participate as professionals in the 'art market'. Furthermore, the artists engaged in these different arts professions do not follow similar career paths and conditions or work within a similar professional structure (taking into account the different elements involved, such as income or wages, management structures, working conditions, and professional modes of practice). I would argue that combining all these various art professions within a single quantitative survey on arts labour for example, will not accurately convey a true picture, but instead will support economic generalizations about arts markets from the point of view of the general consumer (and often the state, multimedia arts organisations, and public arts policy makers). These methods – used as a single tool of research '...belittles and crushes, flattens and trivializes artistic creation; so that it sets the great and small on the same footing, and at all events fails to grasp what makes the genius of the greatest artists' (Bourdieu, 1993, p.139). Often when results achieved on self-employed artists are merged with those from artists tenured within institutions, the combination merely serves to demonstrate overall tendencies within the

arts-related professions. Such results do not have the capacity to indicate particular conditions or the particular motivational forces that operate within the visual art market for self-employed visual artist. Instead they offer a summary of the social and economic value and labour population of 'the arts', and therefore continue to provide disinformation regarding varying data relating to an individual visual art profession.

Some examples that demonstrate the ways in which data can be used to support these kinds of generalizations can be seen by comparing some surveys, such as the analysis by Randall Filer (1986), the study by Richard Florida (2002) and another written by James Heilbrun with Charles M. Gray (2001). In his book 'The Rise of the Creative Class' (2002), Richard Florida, who gathered data from the US creative sector, made an assessment of the positive features of contributions made by the creative class, and their impact on public life-styles. In his investigation of 'Creativity and the creative class', rather than identifying and studying the 'arts' sector he broadened the criteria within his field of study and enlarged it in order to include other professions, such as scientists, publishers, software programmers, and many others who could be referred to as a 'creative class', and which in his view accounts for a total of nearly 38 million Americans. Florida (2002, p.325). states that 'creativity is not an unmitigated good but a human capacity that can be applied towards many different ends'.

The study 'Information on the Artists - 2' by Jeffri and Greenblatt (1997) from Columbia University (Heilbrun and Gray, 2001, p.320) which presented statistics relating to the income of artists living in major US cities in 1996, indicated that approximately 90% of these artists earned less than \$3000-\$7000 in that year, and 6-12% earned more than \$40,000. In their survey they identified the most important reasons for considering someone a professional artist: a) The person has an inner drive to make art; b) the person considers him/herself to be 'an artist'; c) the person makes his/her living as an artist. (Jeffri and Greenblatt, 1997). The outcomes these two

researchers arrived at prompted them to reach the conclusion that because the vast majority of artists received such a low income from their art work, the ‘artists support themselves with earnings from a second job or a second household income’ (Heilbrun and Gray, 2001, p.319). On the other hand, to my mind, it indicates that if 90% of the artists (their data does not reveal what proportion of these are self-employed visual artists) do not earn a living from their professional practice as artists – then their work as an artist is a lifestyle choice, not a profession, since their output as a creative person is viable only because they receive an additional subsidy, or income from other sources. Therefore an economic analysis of these conditions only makes sense from the perspective of consumer. In such situations, where more than 90% of the art professional’s income is below the subsistence level, or not even sufficient to cover basic expenses, then this, for me, is an indication that the individual concerned is not in fact an ‘arts professional’, but rather his/her artistic practice is a hobby, even though it might later evolve into their primary employment and become the individual’s main, fulltime job. And should their arts activity transform itself into a full-time job, they would be very fortunate to be included in that 10% of the working population that receives a proper salary for what they do.

Some of the revelations in Filer’s (1986) analysis, which used 1980 census data on the earnings of the artists investigated and compared the figures of the artist’s wages (including art teachers and art directors) with earnings in other labour categories in the US, were surprising for me. His conclusions revealed that in 1980 people working in arts professions earned approximately 6-10% less than other workers, and that ‘there is no basis for concluding that artists earn any less on average than they would in other jobs’ which contradicts my research outcome, as it does not indicate any sufficient income received by the population of surveyed artists overall, neither from my personal professional observations, and from my experience of the researched sector. However,

some points that Filer raises are important for my own research; firstly, that artist's earnings appear to be age-related in comparison with some other professions – older artists tend to have higher incomes. Artists above the age of 40 typically earn more than the control group (Filer, 1986, p.63-73). Secondly, he makes the point that a larger proportion of artists are in a younger age group than professionals in other labour sectors. Some exceptions to this include painters who have the same age distribution as the typical worker (ibid).

Filer (1986, p.73) makes a third point; that artists, in comparison with some of the career patterns of workers in other occupations, pursue their artistic career for a longer period of time. Research conducted by the Gulbenkian Foundation (1986) arrived at a similar outcome when it showed that artists either were not suitable, or could not make an easy transition into working in other professions, and that this may also be a reason why artists remain working in arts sectors for relatively long periods of time. Filer (1986, pp.56-75) assumes that the artist may be much happier and fulfilled working as arts professional, rather than working in the general labour market.

Filer suggests that a further exploration of the attributes required by the different types of art professions in the arts labor markets (since each requires very different and specific skills and talents) could be useful (Filer, 1986, p.73). His suggestion supports my own view concerning the need to study and evaluate separately the various specialists that exist in the field of artistic labour, and also the need to focus attention on anomalies in the statistical data on artists.



#### IV. The confusion surrounding the ‘artist’s aura’

Though the different approaches (historical, statistical, sociological, economic, philosophical etc) that are used to study art reflect aspects of the contemporary artist’s status, they tend to create a complex portrait, which even the artists themselves struggle to recognize. From the artist as the impoverished genius depicted in the painting *The poor poet* 1839 by Carl Spitzweg (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2009), or the artist on the brink of starvation for entertainment of others described by Franz Kafka ([1915] 1992, pp. 210-219) in his short story *A Fasting Artist*, to the financially successful contemporary artist millionaires such as artist Damien Hirst who sold his art collection for £111.5 million on 15 September 2008 at Sotheby’s in London (Sotheby’s, 2008). This diversification of artists’ earnings supports Abbing’s (2002) point that an economic approach in the arts should be different than in a ‘normal’ economy as it operates in a ‘winner-takes-it-all’ system. This is discussed in this thesis in the Conclusion and Chapter 5. In addition there are of course a host of unrecognized artists who have never figured out how maintain even a modicum of professional success, or earned enough even to cover their basic expenses as an artist, but at the same time have not felt able to abandon their vocation, as artists.

These diverse images of the artist, resulting in a broad portrait of the artist’s status and the nature of his/her role in the past and contemporary arts and society, create obstacles when one is seeking primary information about artist’s establishment. These popular images and the ensuing generalisations about artists’ poverty, or on the contrary their wealth, are the outcome of the paucity of rigorous research about the contemporary artist’s working conditions and their personal and professional motivations for becoming artists. It is frequently the case that individual studies of an artist’s career and life are not supported by any kind of systematic research methods,

because the artist realizes that it could potentially undermine their 'artist's aura' and therefore they carefully construct all information about their personal biography for their benefit.

Thereby the 'artist's aura' that is created by a combination of personal charisma and style, life history, education, beliefs, aspirations, and skills in self-management and promotion can be undermined as well. It isn't that the artist will not be able to produce or create the art objects if he/she loses this 'artist's aura', but that its loss may well have an impact on the degree to which the artist is able to establish himself and the uniqueness of his work, as perceived not only by contemporary society and artists markets but by their peers, as described by Allan Bowness (1983) in the artist's stages of recognition during the modern times.

Fears about the negative impact that well-researched information will have on the 'artist's aura' may relate to information derived from the public domain. For example, politicians, criminals, as well as artists and other people in the public eye often use pseudonyms to disguise their real identity, or for personal protection, or as marketing tool (Sharp, 1975). Another example is in social research when it is often difficult to collect factual information on an artist's family who may have provided the artist with financial support to help him to establish his career (Bourdieu, 1993, p.139). The artist's personality does play an important role in PR and in attracting a specific type of audience. Neale Worley, a 44 year old artist (one of the artists interviewed for this research) gained his 'artist's aura' of the 'classic' British academic painter through living in the draughty studio replete with an 'ancient' wood-burning stove and old furniture for 15 years, after he had graduated from Royal Academy of Art. Because his work is exhibited at an established Mayfair gallery it attracts a certain type of client. In Neale Worley's case one client was HRH Prince Charles who himself has considerable skills as a water-colorist, and who also chose Worley to accompany him to create some

artwork depicting an official visit the Prince made to Pakistan in 2006. Neale Worley's aura of a poor, but talented starving artist is not based on a false reality. As it happens his lifestyle was part and parcel of his highly crafted paintings and a result of the choices he made in the course of his education as an artist (paid for by the state). In my interview with him he confirmed that it was his stubbornness that prevented him from giving up his ambitions. His personal characteristics and his talent helped him to endure the poverty and hardships that he experienced for more than 15 years, for the sake of his craft to which he is dedicated:

Worley: 'I have been doing it long enough already (laughs). So since I left college it has been 17 years already, and I am still struggling and still doing it.

Nina: So you are prepared for the next 10 years to do the same?

Worley: Well I have been going this long, so I am not giving up now.

Nina: Why?

Worley: *I think it is to do with being stubborn.'*

(Interview Codebook [I][NW6][44][M][Pnt][Pro][UK])

But no one can deny that artists want to have a decent lifestyle as much as other professionals, and to be recognised and appreciated by society with established prices for their craft, etc. The question to ask is why do they endure the hardships of an impoverished lifestyle with rewards that are so unpredictable?

Filer's (1986) analysis does show that artists have a higher level of education than those in other areas of employment. He also believes that artists are more likely to practice their art within the framework of the educational institution, rather than expose themselves to the tough realities of the art market. By the time the artist's family or

other funders have paid their bills, it is more likely that they will have achieved the conditions in which they are better able to accomplish their artistic goals.

Though there may be truth in these assumptions there is clearly a need for these areas to be investigated further. For example, I prolonged my education because there was no identifiable path for myself, as an artist, to follow. I enrolled on a series of courses in the belief that I would eventually find that path and arrive at a clearer understanding of how and where best to apply my skills. In addition, the processes involved in my relocation, first from Russia to UK, and subsequently to US, took up a great deal of time while I adapted to new cultural environments and studied what were, for me, new art markets. It took me more than 11 years of postgraduate education to achieve a thorough understanding how the international art market operates and to identify my position within it. As a result I reached the conclusion that I would be unable to pursue a career as a self-employed visual artist without additional subsidy from elsewhere. I therefore deduced that other artists similarly extend their post-graduate education in order to figure out possible career paths and to buy time. And it appears that often when it eventually becomes clear to them that they are unable to sustain a living as an artist they quit their career path later on, as discussed above (Filer, 1986, pp. 63,73). It is also the case that artists create their 'artist's aura' in a very competitive contemporary art market, which requires a very high standard of education from its participants. Sifakakis's (2004) research showed that artists' accreditation by art organisations is often connected to the educational institutions where artists completed their degree courses.

Another assumption made by Filer (1986) is that the artist's success relates directly to the economic stability of the country in which he or she lives, and I agree with this, unequivocally. However, this assertion does not prove that this factor becomes the primary motivation for the artists to produce their art. More than 90% of

those artists I surveyed informed me that they would continue their practice even if it does not provide them with sufficient income. Therefore, I can conclude that while economic stability may foster artistic production, it is not the only factor responsible for the production the work of art and thus that financial reward is not a primary ingredient of ‘artist’s aura’ or risk-taking attitudes.

The assumption in Filer’s (1986) analysis, that artists do not often leave or change their occupation as much as those in other non-artistic professions because they derive greater satisfaction from their work than those involved in other kinds of labour raises an interesting point, that it is not only personal stubbornness of professional perseverance discussed in the case of the artist Neale Worley, this could also relate to psychological impulses within the artist, simply because the process of the creation of the art work is often self-perpetuating, and such that it can make it difficult for the artist stop working and just let go. For me this process of creation is a part of my everyday life: an expression of my mind. Therefore we artists will always attempt to do everything possible to remain closely involved with the artistic profession in the hope that we will eventually be able to achieve financial stability to simply do the work we like to do, and also because we might feel unfit to work in other not-artistic professions. As Neale Worley explained: ‘...also I possibly could not be employed doing anything else, anyway. Because, I am not qualified in anything else.’ These points are discussed further in Chapter 4/I; Chapter 5/II.

In another case relating to the ‘artist’s aura’, it was not a surprise that such an established well-known American artist like Beverly Pepper would reply during the interview to the question *What is your annual income?* by asking: ‘I wonder if any of the other artists you interviewed provided you with this information?’ (Interview Codebook [I][BP1][84][F][Scu][Pro][US/Ita]), and she left the space for the answer in the questionnaire blank; most of the other professional artists also left this

answer blank, but most of the interviewed art students did respond to this question regarding annual income. This indicated for me that the artists, regardless of their individual personal style, are aware that certain kinds of information might not enhance the ‘artist’s aura’ that they presume society expects from them – be it the poor ‘genius’ or the sophisticated ‘toff’.

## V. Career and education or what artists should be taught?

Although there are some exceptions, of contemporary artists who have not had any formal art education or qualification, such as the self-taught Jack Vettriano or Russian artist Stanislav Plutenko (2009), the contemporary art market (including the galleries, curators, art dealers, art collectors) places value on the artist’s education. In Spyros Sifakakis’s (2004) research survey the stakeholders of a major public art gallery indicated:

‘...Susan noted that the process has so much to do with the business of art and then stressed the significance of higher education. MA degrees, she noted, can be obtained anywhere. But she added that ‘if you go to Goldsmith’s or the RCA (Royal College of Art) it is a stepping-stone. So it becomes unnecessary that you’re an amazing artist, but it’s about *where* you are, at what college you got that sort of exposure’.

(Interview with Susan, 17/5/02 in Sifakakis, 2004, p.269)

This state of affairs compels aspiring, novice, artists to gain places to study at famous art education institutions because these not only provide their students with a

good degree, but can also offer them access to a prestigious and influential network from amongst their colleagues. (In my practice, all of the exhibitions I participated in were as a result of networking with my fellow students, and through other contacts I made through them.)

Nevertheless, apart of the prestige of the school's name and the right business contacts for the future, one expects to learn certain skills of professional practice. But as the definition of art shifted into diverse spectrum of meanings, the question arose: what should be included and what is a right curriculum for the education of contemporary artist.

An old academic education in fine arts in Europe, Russia for example is out of fashion. Once prioritised subjects such as academic drawing (pencil, charcoal, ink), painting (watercolor, oil paint, tempera, pastel, color pencil), composition, sculpture with a knowledge of anatomy, perspective, art history, architectural and technical drawing are not the primary subjects in art colleges in UK and US. Nowadays these subjects alone can not satisfy the contemporary students who work within the visual arts specialising in mix media arts with new creative possesses involved.

Below are two examples of my own work to illustrate this point. First is a life-drawing of the Chinese actor Xia Yu done in 2008 using my academic training from Soviet Union. Second are the portraits of the same person using mix media techniques I work with at the present.

Image not available due to copyright restrictions

Case study 5 *Self-Portrait (2003-8)*; Nina11, 2008. Xia Yu. 60x 40 cm, pencil/paper.

Image not available due to copyright restrictions

Case study 5 *Self-Portrait (2003-8)*, Nina11, 2008. Xia Yu (1-4); 51x51cm,oil/canvases



To draw Xia Yu's portrait in pencil took me six hours and was the result of two years of training three hours a day three days a week under supervision of the tutor. On the other hand, to produce four of Xia Yu's self-portraits in mix media (CD, Additional materials, Case study 5, Xia Yu portraits 1-4) only three hours were necessary, of which two hours were spent applying and cleaning oil paint from his face. Despite the fact that it took such a short period of time to produce the four portraits, the amount of preparation involved was approximately a week of work to photograph specific conceptually created images, edit the images to reach a satisfactory composition to be printed on the canvases, buy the specific oil colors and canvases, test print the final selected images on the canvases, spray the canvases to protect the printed surfaces and let them dry for few days so they were ready for oil paint application. This example shows that for my current works of art I do not necessary need to apply the knowledge of the old-academic fine arts schools, but rather the work is often based on managing my conceptual thinking and processes of creating new working methods, which despite overall experience can take a very small amount of time to produce or can be prepared for you by someone else.

This will come as no surprise to BFA graduates of Goldsmiths College, London, that the studio practice allows them to explore their personal interests conceptually as well as in their personal preference in medium of production for their work. From my enquiry in the curricula of art colleges for BA in Art Practice/Fine Art I identified a similarity in their structure:

'The course at Goldsmiths is, for the purposes of marking [i.e. credits - though it doesn't run a credits system] 80% studio practice and 20% critical studies. The later is a taught component with lectures and essay writing requirements. In studio practice the student is free to pursue whatever

combination of media and means which interests them as a direction for their work. (This is support via seminars and one to one tutorials with lecturers)'

(Goldsmiths College, General enquiries, 2010 [email] message to N., Dimitriadi (ninadimitriadi@hotmail.com) Received on 24 February 2010).

Similarly to Goldsmiths College, the course structures in BA in Art Practice in UK, for example at Slade College of Arts, 'aims to enable each student to pursue their ideas in and around painting in all its forms in the most committed, imaginative and experimental way. Work may manifest itself in a wide variety of different mediums and materials. Studio interaction is an essential aspect of the painting course. Each painting student is given studio space and the years are mixed together to provide a lively cross-fertilisation of ideas and practice. The tutorial system and one-to-one tutorials are a crucial part of the course and regular seminars and crits take place where students are encouraged to discuss and present their work to fellow students and staff. Additionally, a series of cross-area seminars provides integration of ideas and practice across the undergraduate school. Workshop programmes to introduce stretcher-making and some materials of painting are available to students. An integral part of the course is the extensive programme of visiting artists and critics, who give tutorials and lectures and participate in seminars' (Slade School of Fine Art, 2009). In New York one of the leading art schools, Pratt Institute (Pratt Institute, 2009), in their BFA program offers to cover students interests similarly to the UK BFA programs: 'Elective courses might include traditional media such as charcoal drawing, bronze casting, etching and ceramics, as well as topics in new media, design disciplines and contemporary conceptual genres. Students are encouraged to plan unique course combinations by pairing requirements with electives that amplify their emerging studio practice. The last

two years of study at Pratt lead to focused aesthetic directions, developing those skills required to realize them professionally. All Fine Arts majors produce a thesis project in their final year, culminating in a public exhibition of their work on the Pratt campus.’

It is clear to me that an art education in UK and US provides students with a liberal approach in choosing media and styles/concepts for their artworks and also allocates students many hours of personal studio work. However, it raises the question of the quality of teaching with this method.

The diversification in styles and personal artistic approaches makes it difficult to have a common studio practice for all students. Rather, it gives students time to be able to work on their own personal preferences, thus making it difficult to assess each of the students during their practice. I explained earlier, how to be able to draw a decent portrait in pencil takes four to six hours, and this is after training in supervised course work for two years three hours a day two times a week. Secondly, the lack of arts management education for students in BFA programs leaves them unprepared to face the conditions of the art market they will be operating within. Soon- Hwa Oh (2009) in her book *From Art School to Art World* addresses the requirement of revising practical courses in art schools in order to teach artists real contextual knowledge of the day to day art market (Oh, 2009, pp.196-7). However, many students during the interviews indicated that they prefer to concentrate on producing artwork during their education rather than on the distribution and promotion of their work. But the contemporary art market does not ask students what they like or do not like to study; it requests a graduate to be able to adapt, and to perform the diverse roles and tasks required to survive and to operate within it. Thus, the graduates from the programs are not prepared to face the competition of the market. Many interviewed students in US and UK indicated that they are prepared to suffer through the market conditions by simply continuing to do what they do, even if after ten years they are not able to generate

income from their work.

The problem with contemporary art education, apart of the dilemma where graduate and post-graduate courses do not provide sufficient understanding of art market operation and arts management skills, is that it is very expensive. For example, in the US in 2008 the fees for the Pratt Institute's MFA (full-time) is approximately \$30,000 per annum (and this doesn't include living expenses and the cost of artist's materials) and at Goldsmiths College in London the MA fees amount to £4200 for a UK citizen, and £13,290 for EU citizens and other international students. According to the Goldsmiths College website brochure a student's living expenses are between £7-9000, per year, but after 10 years living as a student in London I believe the basic living expenses required are closer to a minimum of £11,000 per annum, if not more.

Moreover, many graduates are not able to receive adequate financial reward from professional practice and as a result seek alternative jobs; teaching art is often the solution (Oh, 2009, p.44). However, their college education does not provide any theoretical teaching skills making the situation even more complicated. Teaching art and creating artwork require different skills. My BA and MA courses in teaching fine arts showed the case that acquiring knowledge and skills in methodology of teaching, physiology, pedagogy, psychology and gaining supervised practical experience of teaching art classes are necessary for professional practice. These teaching skills are not taught to MFA or BFA graduates and therefore their practice as teachers in visual arts is very questionable in its quality.

To summarize: the education for an international student enrolled in a full-time MFA program at a prestigious college in New York or London costs more than \$40,000 per annum for tuition and living expenses. Thus, the total estimate of the overall expenditure involved for an art education, including a three to four year BA degree, and two year MFA degree, is between \$200,000-240,000. This is the minimum amount of

capital that an art student must find to be able to eventually provide gallery exhibition organizers or curators with the kind of educational references that they find preferable. To overcome this expenditure on one's education while trying to find opportunities in the art market while also looking for work teaching art or already doing so without the proper skills is a negative perspective of possibilities for nowadays fine art graduates. This confirms my point that it is extremely difficult for early career artists to establish themselves in the contemporary art market without additional financial support from elsewhere. These conditions force artists to wait for this kind of help and/or to become dependant on the gifts of, for example, family money, grants and other funds, all of which are described by Hans Abbing (2002, pp.181-201) in his book *Why Are artists Poor?* Chapter 8: The power and duty to give. Therefore if the stakeholders in the art market expect and require the artist to gain a respectable education, it follows that they also expect artists to find ways and means to obtain the funds, and to make the considerable effort required (in most cases) to do this. This means convincing your family or close friends to invest in your education or future establishment – a process that inevitably requires skills of persuasion, strong self-belief, and the stubbornness to get what you need (which is by no means a small amount of money and time) so as to be able to pursue this career. It should be taught to beginning art students that regardless of the amount of money they invest in their education it would still be difficult to recoup it even after many years working professionally as a self-employed visual artist. Thus it will be abusive to the same family members who invested in their education and as a result will not get their money back or will need to continue to provide support for an unknown period of time in the future. It was not a surprise that the majority of interviewed artists were subsidised by their family and did not need to return the money they received for their education.

## VI. Artists' roles: producer, curator, self-manager, writer/critic, and my own role as an artist in this research

Nowadays, the art market expects art students to be producers of conceptually interesting artwork preferably of high quality, as well as to be educated at a preferred art school. In addition, art students are expected to have developed skills in self-curating, management, and administration, because no one will perform these tasks for them for free. To repeat the quote by Sifakakis (2004) in his interview in which a gallery employee explained that...

‘A work of art doesn’t have any meaning without some sort of context and it’s the job of the people ...who put it out in the world’

(interview with Nadav, 31/1/02 in Sifakakis, 2004, p.267)

Therefore, a major task for the artist will be to create his/her own context so that their artwork will develop significance before the stage where it will hopefully be selected for exhibition by the gallery, which in turn could provide a launch pad for the artist. This situation will be covered in detail in (Chapter 3/IV), and in case studies 1 and 2 that explain the various methods through which it is possible for an artist to become noticed by future patrons, dealers, galleries and other investors. These methods include creating independent shows, or participating in the public festivals that will require the previously mentioned curating-administrating-managerial skills from the artist to be able to work within the festival’s management structure and to conform to its curatorial agenda.

While facing all these issues in my practice as an artist, I became convinced that any successful artist (financially or publicly) must acquire many skills in self curating, management, and administration, while carving out their artistic creative path, simply because it would be very difficult to work productively with an artist who lacks such skills. According to the interview with Alexander Brooke in Ulrike Klein's (Klein, 1994, p.8) book *The Business of Art Unveiled: New York Art Dealers Speak Up* – it is of primary importance for dealers to select very carefully the personality of the artist they will work with. However, there are also other roles that artists should be able to play in the course of establishing themselves in contemporary art market.

Another skill necessary for the artist's success is an ability to write an explanation or review (or else to find someone suitable to write it on their behalf) which will elucidate the artwork they have created in a written form, and contextualise it, so that the curators, exhibition organizers, or dealers can use this written material for their exhibition catalogues, publicity, and promotion. This situation is explained in Chapter 3 where I give examples of my personal practice while exhibiting my work in the course of the last five years, along with a comprehensive argument by Julian Stallabrass (2006, p.270) on the dramatic decline of art criticism, which has largely been replaced by artists' interviews, 'self-reflective writing' and color illustrations, which, he argues, has dominated contemporary art criticism and pushed it towards its grave.

The importance of identifying, understanding, and exploring the diverse roles that artists are to perform must be appreciated by artists for their professional success. It is not only for benefit of future patrons, dealers, galleries and other investors in artists' production but also as a tool for successful competition amongst the ever-increasing population of artists in the currently volatile global economy.

To investigate the roles of artist in contemporary art market and society I have positioned myself as a full-time visual artist participating in various public, private,

local and international exhibitions. I also created a situation in which the artist is self-managing her own exhibition. This practical experience – in the production of artwork, and in exhibiting, managing, curating, promoting art, as a self-employed (full-time) visual artist (with a BA in Fine Arts Teaching, two MAs in Arts, M.Phil. in Arts and Communication, and a PhD candidate in Arts and Communication, with four years work experience in financial business) – all of this can enhance an artist's success. The results that are analysed in Chapter 3 indicate the huge amount of expectation that is placed on the artist to fulfill all the roles that one must practice to succeed in the art market, and for which the artist, to a large extent, is not adequately trained or rewarded. Thus, I will investigate the artist's incentives to continue working, in a further attempt to understand artist's motivation and inspiration to remain being an artist, and here I will refer to semi-structured interviews that I conducted with developing and established artists working in London/UK and New York/US.

As Bourdieu (1994, p.140) outlined the sociology of cultural production should be studied as a set of relationships affecting the creation, between artists, patrons, dealers, galleries and other stakeholders. Therefore, my work is an attempt to gather these sets of relationship from the artist's perspective. Moreover, because of the lack of clarity surrounding the nature of the artist's relationship with other stakeholders in the art market, this has indicated to me the necessity to dig deeper to try to achieve an understanding of the artist's personal motivations, his/her decision-making processes, in order to understand why the artist might remain being an artist when the roles he/she is required to fulfill are disproportionate to what artist should receive – a decent living from their craft.

The emergence of artists' practice that is external to artists' conditions and influences can be summarised as negative. Firstly, the questionable definition of art and artists' professional practice, which is influenced by other stakeholders in art



markets, including publicly funded institutions through which many artists seek to exhibit in order to increase the price of their artworks (Chong, 2002). Secondly, the generalised framework of artists' income and professional environment as presented throughout the quantitative survey data available that deals with a wide spectrum of artists' labor, cannot be trusted for the study of visual artists. Thirdly, early career artists' responsibilities have increased in the contemporary art markets, and they are now required to fulfill expectations of diverse roles: producer, curator, manager, writer/critic, with a strong academic background from prestigious educational organisations. All of these circumstances are exacerbated by an increase in the necessity for artists to perform the myriad of other responsibilities beyond the scope of their education as an artist. Fourthly, these additional requirements as a result of competitiveness cause irrational behaviour from emerging artists who do not comprehend the realities attached to their career development.

My next step is to explain the methodology I apply in this research into contemporary visual artists' professional and personal conditions operating in UK and US arts markets. It will explain my decisions in choosing specific research methods and the stages of this study: from my practice-based field work in international arts market to qualitative research via interviews with a wider population of early career and established artists.

## Chapter 2. On methods: From practice-based case studies to qualitative research

Outlined in Chapter 1 are the numerous external and internal conditions affecting early career artists' personal and professional lives. These conditions are explored in this study firstly through practice, by positioning myself as a self-employed visual artist, and then further researched on a larger sample of practitioners via qualitative research. The practiced-based case studies included: *The Flight* (2003), a large-scale installation where I participated as a artist working in an international art festival; *Eye Dreams* (2004), an independently funded art exhibition where I acted as curator, director and manager for an early career artist; *The Exhausted Body* (2005), an international art exhibition, which I curated, featuring the artwork of established and earlier career artists, as well as my own artwork, in a publicly funded museum; *Return to Beslan* (2005-7), a series of photographs exploring the moral and ethical issues affecting nowadays artist's production; *Self-Portrait* (2003-8), a series of commercially orientated portraits exploring the production, distribution and pricing mechanism available for artists straight after his/her postgraduate art education.

In the second part of the study researched questions evoked from these practices formed the interview with visual artists in practice working in UK and US by surveying 22 early career and established artists (11 MFA students from UK and US and 11 established artists from UK and US) between 2006-2008. This allowed me not only to investigate the reflexive nature of my personal practice (Silverman, 2006, p.388), but also to test its results on a wider international group of artists. For Case study 6 I extracted two of the major research questions from the collected interviews and incorporated them into the concept for the exhibition: *Why are you an artist and How*

*do you define art?* (2006-8) in order to visually present the artists' vocational calling to follow the profession of artist. My intention was to make a circle which moved from practical case studies into the qualitative survey and then return back to practice in order to complete the research by incorporating the survey data into the practical component of the study.

## I. Choosing research methods for the practice-based study

Because this Ph.D. study was originally conceived as practice-based, my selection of the six case-studies in which I functioned as an artist have all played an important part in the process of identifying and defining the nature of my various roles as an artist, as well as affording an understanding of artists internal and external conditions in nowadays art market; they have also provided a foundation for the framing of my primary research questions. As I previously mentioned in Chapter 1/IV, the art world expects artists to perform under certain conditions, or according to Howard Becker (1982, pp. 40-67) *conversions*: 'in which art world participants can act together efficiently to produce works characteristic of those worlds' (Becker, 1982, p.42) thus prescribing the artist with specific roles, functionalities and necessities (educations, personal identities and productions) that they would need to fulfill in order to continue their practice successfully, and without investing money or effort pursuing unconventional or unknown paths (Becker, 1982, p.57). The primary aim, therefore, has been to provide an account of the trajectory that the artist, as a professional, undertakes in the course of preparing, producing and launching artwork into contemporary visual art markets.

The first three case studies, *The Flight* (2003), *Eye Dreams* (2004), and *The Exhausted Body* (2005) were planned as a group that shared a common goal: to achieve a clearer understanding of the nature of the internal and external conditions artists experience in day-to-day practice from the point of view of the artists and also from the point of view of managing the artists professional organisations/individuals. Also, they allowed me to take up the roles of *practitioner* (as artist, curator, manager/administrator) and *researcher* (who would analyse and reflect on the practice) simultaneously. Case study 1 looked into the relationship between an artist creating and exhibiting a large scale art installation and the management of a publicly subsidised art festival; Case study 2 researched the relationship of self-management of an inexperienced artist and the independent curator of her artwork; Case study 3 identified that the creative processes of artists who work within the publicly subsidised museum are influenced by these institutions. Case study 4 looked into the morals and ethics of contemporary artwork and what stimulates the production of 'sensational' works of art; Case study 5 experimented with different modes of selling artworks.

The dual role as both artist and researcher made me aware of my own biases as artist-practitioner, and gave me a valuable frame of reference (Bryman, 2001, p.22; Becker, 1967) while I was making decisions about the selection of the case studies and which methods to use when compiling these studies. I deliberately made an effort to avoid pushing my investigation in favour of any one of my roles, that of either artist, or curator, or manager, or researcher, when assessing, for example, the curator's practice values in comparison with those of the artist. I also attempted to reflect, routinely, on common negative outcomes of my practice that could also affect artists' motivation in their own future practice, and to try to discover new attributes which might be adopted to improve it with a necessary measure of objectivity in artists' practice.

Sifakakis in his research into art organisations in UK and their accreditation mechanisms describes how the absence of qualitative social research and analysis of public art galleries (of operational practices, organisation polices, HRM, management and programming, audience and everyday administration) has made it difficult to research the social construction of their organisational operation. These organisations marginalise or misrepresent the discourses of their audience but also of the organization's insiders (Sifakakis, 2004, p.78). I also faced a similar problem - of the absence of social research on artists' motivations and decision-making processes. However, my own personal practical experience as an artist, as an insider-practitioner, was of considerable benefit when I evaluated not only the artist's decision-making processes, but also when I assessed the institutional operational mechanisms studied by Sifakakis. His research gave me a useful foundation when I examined questions relating to the legitimacy of contemporary artists in international art organizations and their accreditation mechanisms. It also led me to investigate and to understand more clearly how this accreditation can actually benefit artists, and the ways in which it can inspire and motivate to deliver their practice to these institutions, or else on the contrary can provoke artists to practice outside of the institutional establishment or established market, which mostly requires considerable investment and of effort, time and money from the artist.

Also, my objective was to uncover the rationale supporting the production and sale of the artwork as a commercial product. How does an artist who is new to the market begin to sell his/her work? What kind of strategy must they adopt in order to achieve sales? To answer these particular questions I made a series of conceptual portraits *Self-Portrait* (2003-8) with the primary aim of selling them. This case study reflects the processes of production and distribution, and the attempt to raise funding, or at least to cover production costs. The data that I collected and analysed helped me to

reflect on the tenacity of artists who continue to pursue a path where they might often only achieve the results they wish for after years of dedicated work. I used video, still photography and observation notes to record the outcomes of the practice.

Furthermore, I made an attempt to transform my research interviews into an art exhibition that incorporated, along with examples of the artwork of each interviewed artists along with a selection of their responses as to how they understood their professional field (DVD film, Case study 6). This proposed exhibition was submitted to the Research Department, University of Brighton, for presentation at Brighton University Gallery. However, it was not staged for the same reasons explained in the case study description in Chapter 3. Funding and organizing this exhibition would require collaboration between the University's Research Department and the Gallery, which proved nearly impossible after extensive efforts on my part to initiate a dialogue, along with several months of my own work of generating the exhibition proposal, initial discussion meetings, and editing exhibition material into DVDs. This experience resembled the outcome of case study Chapter 3/I in which publicly subsidized institutions require the artist to work in exchange for marginal costs or no remuneration at all.

## II. Case study methodology

The first case study *The Flight* (2003) discussed in Chapter 3/I was created for an international art festival that I chose to exhibit at, both as a visual artist, and as a researcher intent on compiling the other artist-participants' observations. My task was to complete a site-specific art installation at a location in Taiwan; the exhibition was publicly subsidized by a Taiwanese governmental body. This art festival was

recommended to me by a colleague – a Taiwanese artist and researcher, Dr. Yung-Hsien Chen, who had already participated in this festival in previous years and who provided me with a video film he made, *Heart Sutra, documentary film* (2002), which he had submitted as the practice part of his Ph.D. (Chen, 2004). study of his installation. All this helped me to gain an overview of the festival and the scale of the work that was required, and from that I formed particular expectations and assumptions of what I might experience during my practice as a participating artist in this exhibition. From Chen's video I gathered that my participation would require me to produce my artwork on-site at the event's location, and to curate my own work (as it had to be made in situ, in line with the required curatorial themes). However it was not possible to anticipate in advance the kind of working conditions that would prevail at the installation site, including the lack of availability of working materials in the local shops, the conditions imposed by the festival's management and administration that were different from the previous event, and the erratic communications (including language difficulties), in addition to accidents such as power cuts, technical hitches, etc. Therefore, I chose to collect data by recording it on video and some of this material later formed the basis of my 17 min documentary film, *The Flight* (2003), attached with this thesis (DVD film, Case study1). In my video I aimed to depict the working conditions, the scale of the work involved, and the atmosphere of the event. I also recorded my observations, which included various notes and documents, relevant emails, the artist's contract, and conversations collected during the course of my work at the festival presented in the research.



Case study 1. *The Flight* (2003). Construction site with the container allocated for the installation



Case study1. *The Flight* (2003). The container prior to the installation

My primary aim throughout was to combine a detailed account of the conditions that I, together with 14 international artists, was subjected to during this festival.



Image not available due to copyright restrictions

Case study 1. *The Flight* (2003). List of the works at the visual arts exhibition.

Catalogue of Kaohsiung International Container Art Festival. 2003. pp 58-61

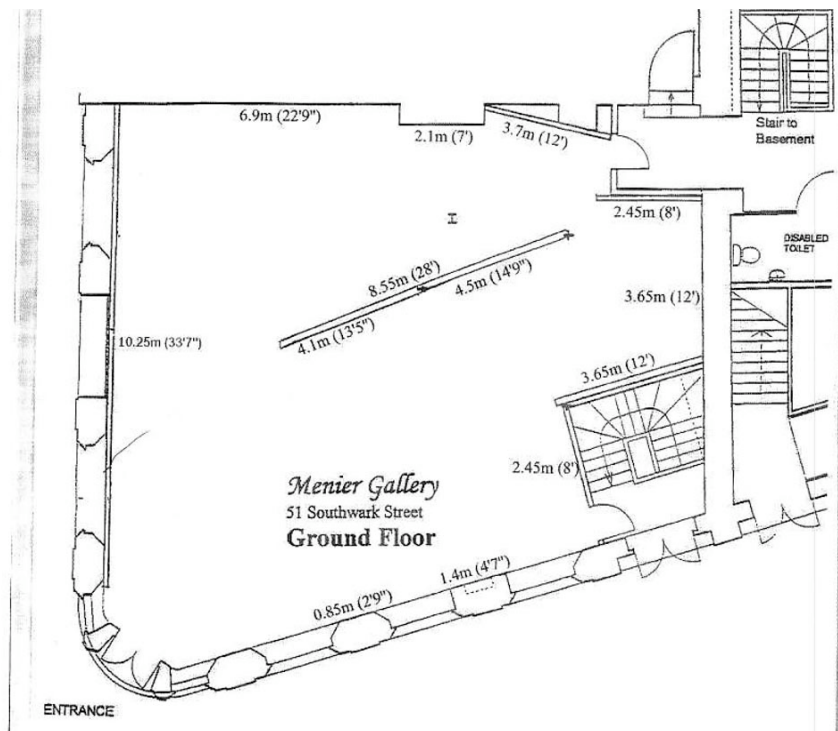
I also aimed to undertake all the functions a participating artist was required to fulfill in order to satisfy the festival's organizers. For example, the German artists' team (United Transnational Republic, 2007) disagreed with the festival management about some conditions written into the contract and in spite of this, although one of the team members had already participated in this festival previously, they decided to drop out of the project (Chapter 3/I). However, the team managed to stage another container project at the Oslo Open in 2007.

This negative event, in fact, took place before my contract was signed, and it indicated to me that the accreditation process and the contractual conditions imposed on the participating artists by the institution managing the event (in this case Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Art) was significant for my research question, and that my personal experience of these processes, as a participating artist, would also be advantageous for my study.

The selection of the second case study, *Eye Dreams* (2004), which included both the exhibition and the applied research methods, was deliberate. From the experience I gained while compiling *The Flight* (2003), the art festival case study, it seemed to me important to investigate the reasons why the festival's management felt it necessary to burden the participating artists with financial and managerial responsibilities in a way that was restrictive and was unfair to the artists. For this purpose I selected a colleague, Zeyno Dagli, who does not consider herself an artist, but rather a researcher (from 2000-2001 at Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design, London and M.Phil. from University of Brighton) although she had received extensive training in art and design and potentially had all the skills and desirable education (MA in Design Futures from Goldsmiths College, London, BA in Industrial Design from Marmora University of Fine Arts, Istanbul) to be able to produce artwork plus the motivation to become an exhibiting artist. I teamed up with Dagli and together we rented a private gallery space located close to the Tate Modern gallery, on London's South Bank, where we staged a solo-exhibition of her video work and selected paintings.



Case study 2. *Eye Dreams* (2004) exhibition. Menier Gallery. London



Case study 2. *Eye Dreams* (2004) exhibition. Menier Gallery first floor plan. London

I was intent on examining and analysing the skills that were required from an artist to deal effectively with the management of this kind of event, including skills in coordinating with the gallery's management, as well as self-management skills. By positioning myself into the role of the curator, director and manager of the exhibition I also wanted to explore why it was that the managements of arts organizations, as it

happened in the study *The Flight* (2003), appear to impose the kind of restrictions on their exhibiting artists that they themselves would find unacceptable or difficult to tolerate.

The *Eye Dreams* (2004) exhibition showed that an artist who has not previously had opportunities to practice management and administration skills in the course of setting up and displaying his/her own art exhibition would require additional training and experience in order to produce an event that would meet the most basic standards that should be equally required by both gallery administrators and artists. While staging this exhibition with an inexperienced artist such as Dagli, I was able to analyse – as the director, curator and manager of this exhibition – the impact of the process on myself, a process that was composed of a variety of administrative tasks, many extra responsibilities and time consuming issues, and thereby I managed to identify why and how the gallery's management is able to place unnecessary restrictions on the artist in order to avoid and protect themselves from spending unwarranted time with inexperienced early career art practitioners. In addition, because of my previous management experience and education in arts management, I was able to see how opportunities for unprofessional or inexperienced artists can improve their managerial and administration skills during practical experience under supervision. Thus, the practice helped me to determine that the artist who lacks experience in staging a public event might need, over and above the actual production of artwork, additional education in arts management and administration in order to survive in the market. This is particularly true, as explained in Chapter 3/I, because art institutions often impose excessive restrictions on artists in order to avoid or protect themselves from potential mismanagement. The content of this exhibition, its installation, and the exhibition's launch was recorded on video and later edited into a 17 min DVD documentary film, *Eye Dreams* (2004), attached with this thesis (DVD film, Case study

2), to record the evidence of practice available with this research, and some of the documentation of the event that provided the primary data for the investigation.



Case study 2. *Eye Dreams* (2004) exhibition. Installation process at Menier Gallery.

London



Case study 2. *Eye Dreams* (2004) exhibition. Menier Gallery. London

My practice-based approach in the case studies *The Flight* (2003) and *Eye Dreams* (2004) incorporated what Graeme Sullivan (2005, pp.100-1) has termed

‘reflective practice’, which uses different methods in testing existing theories and practices so they can be seen from different perspectives. Similarly to the methods used in the reflexive practices he describes I have, for instance, noted my personal responses (both emotional and analytical) while experiencing particular conditions in the course of my practice, where my own values confronted conditions that were familiar to me, but where I found they were rooted in a different set of circumstances. I was able to reflect upon this experience, and I gathered information firstly from the point of view of the artist, and secondly I then re-imagined the same experience from the point of view of the gallery personnel managing the artist, and all this then prompted me to develop a different strategy and approach that would be suitable for my next case study, where I combined the kind of analysis which I had adopted in the case study *The Flight* (2003) with the outcomes of the exhibition *Eye Dreams* (2004). This evolved into the staged case study, *The Exhausted Body* (2005). In this my aim was to repeat the experience of the previous two case studies, but on a larger scale, so that it would involve many artists who in day-to-day life serve commercial and public art markets, and the management personnel of a publicly subsidised museum. This allowed me to open a *dialogue* (Sullivan, 2005, p.101) with the information and knowledge I had collected, because the information amassed in these three case studies offered significant repetitive patterns to be interpreted through my reflection on the outcomes of practice-problematic situations, while at the same time taking into consideration the theory underpinning the field.

The case study *The Exhausted Body* (2005) is an exhibition of 10 international artists (both established and early career) including myself. To test the findings from the previous two case studies, *The Flight* (2003) and *Eye Dreams* (2004), I decided that in order to avoid making generalisations based on single cases my own practice as an individual artist/curator/manager (in each of these fields) should be tested against this

larger group of artists, as they represented a diverse range of experiences and backgrounds.

I chose to set the exhibition, *The Exhausted Body*, in the same city, Kaohsiung, Taiwan as the first case study, *The Flight* (2003); it was also hosted by the Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts (a publicly subsidized state museum). In the first instance the opportunity came about because I received a verbal invitation from the Kaohsiung Museum's curator to curate a new exhibition as a result of the success of my previous collaboration with my colleague Dr. Yung-Hsien Chen on staging the Random-ize video and film festival in London, UK in 2002 and Taipei, Taiwan in 2003 (Taipei Times, 2003). In the art world it is common to receive invitations as a result of a word of mouth recommendation or successful practice in the past. Invitations can also result from personal connections with someone who might recommend an artist to an organization or from having achieved a recognized body of work (Becker, 1982, p.86), all of which endow the artist with a reputation that can be trusted. In the second place I welcomed the invitation because one of the purposes of my research was to observe the practices adopted by management of the museum towards a curator/artist, in order to record some useful comparisons as to how this same museum, which managed my activities as an individual artist at a large-scale international festival, as with the case study *The Flight* (2003), might facilitate my work as a freelance curator, and where a different number of personnel and managerial practices were employed in the museum production.

I selected the participating artists using the same method applied by the Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts to select me – I invited artists whom I already knew from my previous practice, apart from Oleg Kulik (Tate Modern, 2003), whose work I was interested in, but who I had not previously worked with. The selection methods I adopted allowed me to work with artists whom I could trust to deliver their work within

a specified timeframe thus minimizing the possibility of delays in the schedule (Becker, 1982, p.81). They also agreed to lend me their artworks without charging a fee, and in addition they did not ask me to insure their work in the event of damage in transit. As a result of this personal trust I had no written agreements with any of the artists where I would have been liable for loss or damage of any of the artwork. Thus, I had no additional expenses, which would not have been covered by the museum and therefore, if incurred, I would have needed to pay for myself. It was helpful for me as a curator/manager in order not to invest additional money into the project, but it was risky for the artists, who often practice lending their artwork without the protection of insurance.

The Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts' Forum for creativity program, under which I was exhibiting, did not offer me any salary as a curator, as a manager nor as an artist; if they had it would have helped me to run the exhibition with greater efficiency when I was selecting the artworks for the exhibition. It was because of this that I could not afford to spend time on researching new artists, pay artists a salary for participation in the exhibition or insure their artworks. Also the artists I invited were all involved in making artwork with a conceptual background that matched my exhibition's concept, which was 'the use of the human body in contemporary visual arts' (CD, Additional material, Case study 3, Catalogue, p.7).

I chose to record the installation of the individual works of art and the setting up of the exhibition with video and still photographs, in a manner similar to that which I had adopted with previous case studies. This allowed me to portray visually the condition of the works of art, the activities of the personnel involved, and the scale and atmosphere of the event (DVD film, Case study 3). As before, I accompanied this visual material with observational notes and a journal in which I recorded my



impressions, in addition to a diary that I used to record details about my own artworks that I produced for this show:



Case study 3. *The Exhausted Body* (2005) exhibition. The performance of Nina11 making 'Self-portrait' at the Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts.



Case study 3. *The Exhausted Body* (2005) exhibition. Nina11's small scale installation 'Hope for the Better Consequences' (2003) at the Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts.



Case study 3. *The Exhausted Body* (2005) exhibition. Nina11's small scale installation 'Gas Mask' (2003) at the Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts.

The fourth case study, *Return to Beslan* (2005-7), investigated the moral and ethical dilemmas that confront the artist who is devising a contemporary artwork with morally questionable subject matter. By morally questionable subject matter in the work of art, I refer to artwork or creative products that incorporate documentary experiences that are traumatic for human beings, dead or alive. My main objective in this case study was to attempt to gain some insights into the artist's motivation for using controversial and traumatic themes, which can directly or indirectly harm people who have experienced the events or circumstances that are the subject of the artwork.

These themes are now fashionable in contemporary art (Sifakakis, 2004; Stallabrass, 1999). Artists have adopted certain tendencies, for example especially in 'Brit Art' during 'Saatchi decade' (Price, 1999), where they became accustomed to investing their work with sensationalist themes that aimed to shock audiences. Despite hostile responses from the public, work of this kind continues to be exhibited not only in private but also in public galleries. For example, Marcus Harvey transferred a

photograph of Myra Hindley (a notorious child murderer) into his portrait of her by using a cast taken from a child's hand to make the painting. This work was exhibited in Royal Academy of Arts and was later included in the permanent collection at Charles Saatchi's gallery, then on London's South Bank, and provoked considerable anger not only from the parents of the murdered children but also from the UK tabloid press. Several significant questions that then occurred to me were: What motivated the artist to contrive such a work? If Hindley had killed the artist's own child, would he have still made it? And, why doesn't society introduce any moral and ethical code for artists similar to the codes practised by other professions such as those that exist for academic researchers, doctors or social workers?

Paradoxically, a negative public response can act as advertisement for the artist (in a way very similar to the tabloid press commentaries about the addictions of celebrities such as pop singer Britney Spears) and can have a positive impact on an artists' sales or their name recognition by the public. Questions then arise, such as: Why does this kind of artwork attract the public, and why do they give it their attention?

According to Howard S. Becker (1982, p.14) the public considers the artist to be 'a talented and gifted individual who embodies those special, rare powers'. Becker (1982, pp.14-15) believes that since the Renaissance this perception has had the effect (in Western Europe at least) of allowing artists 'not to be subjected to the constraints imposed on other members of society' so that 'in return society receives work of unique character and invaluable quality'. This explanation, I believe, comes close to clarifying why it is that controversial and sensationalist themes in the kind of artwork are exhibited to the public and discussed. Might there be any other reasons for this particular phenomenon in the visual arts? Could it be that the public likes to see violent or disturbing subjects as a part of shocking entertainment? While I was positioning

myself as an artist in the case study *Return to Beslan* (2005-07), these questions were related at this point not only to my motives for producing the artwork, but also to the reaction of the public towards my actions during the process of creating and exhibiting the work.



Case study 4. *Return to Beslan* (2005-7) photographic series. Nina11's Photograph *Birthday Boy* (2005) at Beslan's cemetery.



Case study 4. *Return to Beslan* (2005-7) photographic series. Nina11's Photograph  
*Wall of Blood* (2005) at Beslan's School N1.



Case study 4. *Return to Beslan* (2005-7) photographic series. Nina11's Photograph  
*Denture* (2006) at Beslan's School N1.

Bearing these points of view and questions in mind, I began work on my case study *Return to Beslan* (2005-7). My aim was to find out more about what compels an artist to use morally transgressive subject matter in their artwork, and why, in spite and as a result of the inevitable controversy, galleries display this work and the public comes to view it. The outcome of the case study begs the question: is there anything that can be done to subvert or modify this, apparently, institutionalised abuse that influences the construction of the artists' motives to produce sensational artwork based on the horror of other human beings suffering, which can further harm already victimized people?

The concept of the case study was concerned with a terrorist act, which took place between September 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2004, in the small city of Beslan located in North Ossetia-Alaniya, in Russia on the border with Ingushetia and Chechnya. The terrorists demanded that Russian President Vladimir Putin formally declare the independence of Chechnya within the Commonwealth of Independent States of Russian Federation, and in return they would release the hostages. The terrorist act that took place at School N1 took away the lives of more than 300 schoolchildren and adults and destroyed many families. My decision to work with an act of terrorism as the background to my investigation came about for two reasons: firstly, members of my family live near Beslan, so through them I was already familiar with many of the political problems in the region for many years prior to this terrorist act, and my family connection made me more involved with this event than if it had been a randomly selected case; and secondly, I was asked by people who knew my previous case study, *The Flight* (2003), (whose theme was concerned with a tragic mid-air collision next to Lake Constance in Switzerland and which also killed many children), to dedicate my next project to the tragedy of Beslan. The people who invited me to do this project still live in the region

where the Beslan tragedy took place and they helped me to gain access as a local person.

While I was working on this case study, and after completing it, I managed to identify three separate stages in the work, as it proceeded:

1. *A feeling of doing something wrong* – arriving and photographing the school and the cemetery where most of the victims were buried with no supportive documentation or consultation with the authorities or relatives of the victims.

2. *Trying to find justification* – after the first photo shoot I felt that I was abusing the terrorist aftermath for my own artistic justification and wanted to clarify my actions with the relatives of victims.

3. *Being accepted* – the relatives of the victims accepted and encouraged me to continue working on the project.

Stage 1 - *A feeling of doing something wrong*. I arrived at the site of the tragedy, School N1, without any authorization or credentials from either local or state authorities or other organizations. I proceeded to take many photographs of very disturbing scenes depicting the aftermath of the tragedy. The photographs I took included areas of the gymnasium floor where most of the children and their parents had died, large bloodstains on the walls, the personal belongings of the victims, and so on. My own ‘moral compass’ as an artist told me then that I had a right to take these photographs (there were no notices anywhere forbidding photography, and no one stopped me from photographing these scenes). But while I was taking these photographs I became overcome with a feeling that by doing so, for my own purposes, I was also abusing the memory of those who had suffered and died, and this feeling began to inhibit me. What if I was killed or injured in similar tragic circumstances, would I like someone like an

artist to use my pain as a part of an art project? What if my own child had died in the school, and I found someone standing with a camera and tripod on the exact spot where my child had died? After taking three rolls of photographs I stopped working and I left the school.



Case study 4. *Return to Beslan* (2005-7) photographic series. Nina11's photograph *Remains of Roof reflected in Water and Ice* (2005) at Beslan's School N1 Gymnasium.

Stage 2 - *Trying to find justification to continue my work*. I attempted to seek acceptance, and permission to continue my work at School N1 from the local community. Subsequently, after I contacted the committee of the 'Mothers of Beslan' (a group composed of the relatives and friends of the victims of the terrorist act) I was able to make a reassessment. Because the committee welcomed me, the bereaved parents allowed me to become closer to the reality of the tragedy and to the impact this trauma had left on their lives. My point of view then gradually became merged with that of the parents, who at that stage had taken a stand against the government authorities and public. By taking the victims' and survivors' side I also took on extra



responsibilities, which included an undertaking to report to the committee about the progress of my work, to take additional photographs specifically for them, and to give them copies of any of my photographs and other data so they could use them for their own purposes. Although their requests meant I would have to do a considerable amount of extra work, my commitment to work with them made me feel as if my presence was much more morally acceptable than I felt it to be during stage 1, simply because I asked permission to work from the representatives of the victims.



Case study 4. *Return to Beslan* (2005-7). Nina11's photograph *You are not Alone* (2005) of the Scholl N1 gymnasium were most of the victim died in September 2004.

Stage 3 - (The final stage) - *Being accepted*. After I had established a good relationship with members of the committee, I was then introduced to many other people who were involved in the tragedy in different ways. Other parents and even officials from the local authorities began to acknowledge my presence, and to address me by my name, and allow me access to areas which I had previously been prevented from visiting. I also established a good rapport with other people working there and

this showed me some of the different approaches an independent researcher or employed filmmaker can pursue while working within a local community.



Case study 4. *Return to Beslan* (2005-7) photographic series. Nina11's Photograph *Memorial Candles at 12 am on 3 September* (2007). Each of the candles, set in front of the Gymnasium of School N1, represents a dead victim.

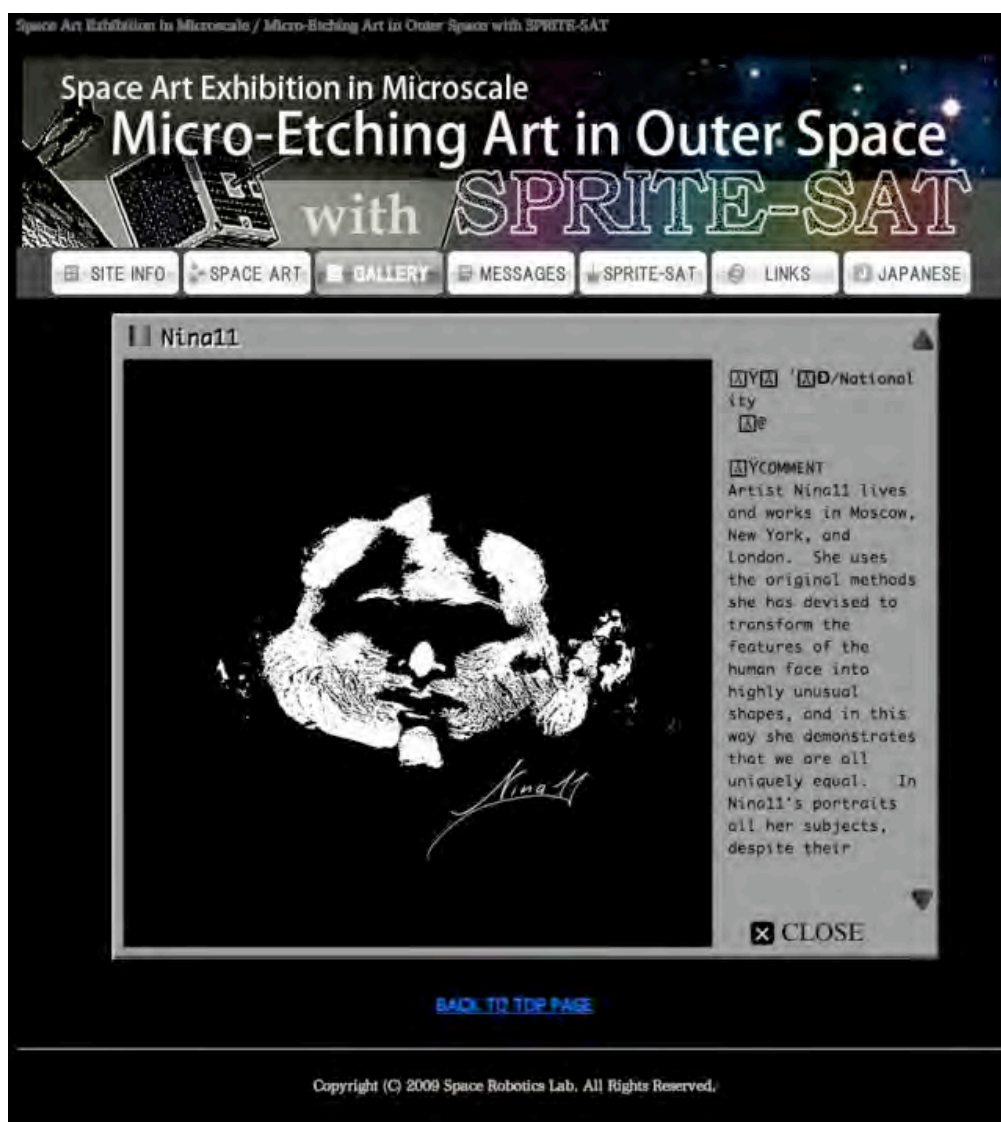
An account of this research data can be found in an edited version of the 8 min documentary film, *Heavy Weight* (DVD film, Case study 4), attached with this thesis, which gives the viewer a visual explanation of what happened during the tragedy. Part of the documentary footage together with my still photographs shows the extent of the destruction caused by the act of terrorism.

This case study also demonstrated for me that whatever an artist's justification may be for incorporating human tragedy into his/her work, a consideration of the rights of abused people (the potential subjects) should take precedence over and above any

effects that the artist wishes to achieve in his work despite the fact that it can increase the amount of time, and financial and personal involvement required by the artist to create the work. This also made me realise that public art organisations can seek sensational artwork from contemporary and emerging artists as such art can provoke controversy in the press and general public. This result, even if negative, functions as promotion for the exhibition, institution, artist and tragic event, thus increasing the attendance and press attention to the organisation. Among the artworks I produced for the six case studies, the case study *Return to Beslan* (2005-7) was the most exhibited work (CD, Additional material, Case study 4, Nina11 CV). For these reasons it seems inevitable that artists will be attracted to using this kind of material in their projects as it has the most potential for exhibition and public attention despite that it is generally not art but rather a documentary account of the aftermath of the terrorist act. As a result, it then became clear to me that there is a need to introduce a moral and ethical code to be used by visual artists who intend to work with this kind of tragic, real-life, subject-matter in order to prevent potential abuse of the subject. Finally, a work of art produced in this way should not be considered simply as a work of art, because the process of documenting and transforming this source material into a saleable product is, from my own point-of-view, an immoral act. It is further discussed in Chapter 3.

On the contrary to case study 4, *Return to Beslan* (2005-7), which focused on moral and ethical issues in the production of artworks, case study 5, *Self-portrait* (2003-8), aimed to investigate the commercial art market. I produced more than 20 portraits since 2003 by applying oil or acrylic paint directly on the face of specific individuals who became my models and then printed their face on primed canvases (DVD film, *Self-portrait* (2003-2008)). In this case study I was concerned with attempting to find ways to sell the paintings, to establish a pricing mechanism, to create a style of painting that can be recognised and to development my artist's signature together with

developing my artist's pseudonym. All of which were part of the commercialization process of the art-product. Meanwhile, I promoted the paintings via publicly and privately subsidised institutions to help the product become recognised in the art market. A particularly unique place to exhibit one of my portraits was in an art exhibition in outer space: artworks were micro-etched on the Sprite-Sat satellite, created by Tohoku University, and successfully launched by Japan's H-IIA rocket (on IBUKI satellite) from Tanegashima Space Center on 22 January 2009 (JAXA, 2009).



Case study 5. *Self-Portrait* (2003) by Nina11 exhibited in an outer space micro-etching art exhibition on Sprit-Sat satellite created by Tohoku University and launched on 22 January 2009 and still orbiting.

### III. Designing the semi-structured interview

After partly completing my fifth case study, *Self-portrait* (2003-8), I discovered that my self-reflective practices (which produced material such as observation notes, visual evidence including video and photographs, and critical analyses) had systematically raised repeated questions about my art practice and the conditions in which it was performed. I also found that these questions were relevant to many of the artists I met while working on these studies, and that they were questions related to factors contributing to the formation of the artists' working experience and to their lives in general. A debate began to evolve within myself – between the practical experience I gained while undertaking the responsibilities of artist, art manager and researcher, on the one hand, and on the other hand that of a general theoretical approach related to the practice of the visual artists to which I had gained special access while taking on these practical roles. This debate stimulated critical reflections that incorporated a range of subject matter involved with aspects of practice and theory, which I had previously encountered.

Scholars have noted that such eclectic combinations of reflective practices and subjects can 'question content and context as problematic situations are revealed within particular settings' (Alvesson and Scolberg, 2000, p.249; Sullivan, 2005, p.101). In the case study analyses in Chapter 3 and 4 I had confronted many of the questions that were elicited, but I had also discovered there were other questions that could not be validated or assessed using self-reflections taken from my personal experience. These would need to be tested on a larger sample taken from a 'population' of artists (Bryman, 2001, pp.30,168-169).

I therefore devised a semi-structured interview schedule that comprised 23 questions derived from my practice as artist, art manager, and curator to be researched on 22 artists. These questions were divided into two sections. In one section 11 questions dealt with aspects of the identity of the artist being interviewed, and in the second section there were a further 12 questions relating to the technical nature of the artist's practice (Appendices, Interview sample). In addition, I constructed a questionnaire, to be completed by the artist on their own, which contained a total of 24 questions relating to factual data about the artists interviewed (Appendices, Questionnaire sample).

I decided to use a semi-structured interview as a research method so that I could 'ask further questions in response to what are seen as significant replies' (Bryman, 2001, p.110). In addition, the use of the video allowed me to record the artists' body language and facial expressions (essential for my observation notes) while the questions were asked (Silverman, 2006, p.19), and in some cases the video captured the atmosphere of the artist's studio as well. However, one of the primary reasons to video record the interviews, as opposed to only sound recording, was the potential to transform the data into an art project – as in case study 6: *Why are you an artist and How do you define art?* (DVD film, Case study 6; CD, Additional material, Case study 6, Exhibition Proposal). This film, which incorporated a deliberate reflexive approach to the data collected, was intended for my proposed exhibition including the work of each interviewed artists, which I hoped would be shown at the University of Brighton's Gallery in conjunction with the Research Department of the University of Brighton.

The questionnaire was devised to save time when collecting factual data on the artists (age, gender, location, nationality, etc.). In some cases artists sent their completed questionnaires to me via email, which saved time while recording the interview, and also in the transfer of the data into electronic format.

Since I have been working and studying art within a community of visual artists for more than 18 years, I was familiar with artists' special sensibilities and their capacity to communicate their experiences openly. It was one of the reasons as well that I opted to video-record the interviews rather than to adopt the more traditional data-collecting method via tape-recorded interviews. I was concerned however that using an array of open questions in the interview would be time-consuming (Bryman, 2001, p.143) and also not cost-effective, since one-60min Micro MV tape in London costs 14 GBP. Nevertheless, after I had completed the first three interviews I was reassured that I had made the correct choice as I discovered that a 60 min videotape provided sufficient duration, and as each of my 22 video-recorded interviews in fact only lasted between 40 minutes and one hour. This visual record, as well as the non-verbal responses to my research questions complemented my observation notes, and I believe helped to convey a vivid impression of the artist's individual persona, their style, and what I describe in this research as the 'artist's aura' – the artist's personality, individuality, and behavioural style, which according to Hauser (1982, p.244) 'still retains some of the charismatic quality which surrounded his (artist) ancestors,' as opposed to the 'aura' of the work of art described by Walter Benjamin ([1935] 1969).

My selection of the artists to be interviewed was based on where their practice was located. I chose 11 artists practicing in the UK and 11 practicing in the US. However, the origins of these artists were diverse and overall the group I chose included 10 different nationalities. I selected artists practicing in the US and the UK for two reasons. Firstly, in each of these countries the state's involvement in supporting arts is markedly different, therefore the individual artist establishment can differ in its pattern, and this may be reflected in the interview answers. For example, American MFA students were much more commercially determined than their British colleagues. Partly this is due to the high tuition fee they must overcome after

graduation, where UK tuition for a similar program is partly covered by the state subsidy (one year MFA course costs approximately \$30,000 USD compared to 3,500 GBP per year for UK local students and 7-9,000 GBP per year for overseas students in a similar program). Secondly both countries have leading international art markets and a vibrant art scene (Chong, 2007), in terms of art education and art practice, and produce a wide range of visual art. I further subdivided each of the two groups (in the UK and in the US) into almost equal halves; one half consisted of artists who were in the early stages of their career, and the other half consisted of those who were already established. The reason I made this decision was to see if I could find out if any changes in personal and professional expectations might be related to the artist's age, as distinct from any contemporary trends that may have existed in art markets, and which might have resulted in shifts in the artists' motivations and decision-making processes.

Elements from the video recorded interviews were eventually incorporated into my final case study: *Why are you an Artist? and How do you define art?* (2006-8). This particular case study provides the culmination of my research in which I combined the outcomes of the practice-based studies with data assembled from the interviews. This resulted in a 30 min long video combining extractions from my video-interviews and divided into two parts; the first consisted of more than 20 visual artists' responses to the question: *Why are you an Artist?* and in the second part, the same artists responded to the question: *How do you define art?* The answers selected were extracted from the hour-long video interview that I made with each of these 22 (either early-career or established) artists who were surveyed in the course of this research between 2006-8. The original interviews are analysed and discussed in Chapter 4.

My original intention was to present these two leading questions – *Why are you an Artist? and How do you define art?* that arose from my practice-based study, to a larger sample of artists. I would then edit a video compilation of each of the artist's



replies to the questions, which would be exhibited alongside the artist's artwork, so that their theoretical responses could be viewed in conjunction with their practical work. I believed that by giving my research a visual dimension in this way, I could usefully provide a clearer understanding of ways in which an artist's personal art theories are tied to their everyday life and work. However, when I submitted the proposal for this exhibition to the University of Brighton's Gallery (details of the proposal and exhibition's budget can be found in Chapter 3 in the case study analysis) Barry Barker (my second supervisor and Director of University of Brighton Gallery) informed me that I would need to find financial support from the University's Student Research Division in order to mount this exhibition because the gallery could not finance it themselves. The Student Research Division was very interested in the proposal, but because of differences in the administrative policies of the Gallery and the Student Research Division I eventually realized that a) devising a schedule for this exhibition, which would occupy the main space of this Gallery of University of Brighton, would be complicated and ultimately unrealistic (especially because the gallery's events and exhibitions programme was fixed for about two years in advance) and b) such an exhibition would require a considerable investment of my own time and money (CD, Additional material, Case study 6, Exhibition proposal)

Not *only* did this project involve a considerable commitment of my own time and money, but also it was very similar to the procedures that I had experienced in each of the previous case studies. Even if I had been offered the possibility of a space to exhibit this exhibition in other locations in the university (students are frequently given permission to exhibit their work in auditoria, lecture theatres, or corridors) many of the established artists in my group, including one who is represented by Marlborough Gallery in New York, and others who are represented by high profile international galleries would not have agreed to such a condition (though interviewed students would

be more likely to agree). In addition, I would not have been able to obtain permission from these artists or be able to insure their works for this purpose as exhibiting in a public space greatly increased security risks, thus the insurance, if even possible to obtain, would be quite costly.

Taking in account all of the factors stated above I decided that without a salary or any appropriate subsidy I could not proceed with this exhibition. Because I had previously financed and produced all the case studies for this research myself, I was not left with sufficient resources to complete another project such as this without some financial remuneration. Nevertheless, should a subsidy be found at any time, this exhibition is ready to mount. The case study is already assembled on video and the interviews have been recorded on DVD along with the exhibition proposal (DVD film, Case study 6).

#### IV. Interviewing the artists

At the outset of each interview issues relating to confidentiality and disclosure of the participants' details were addressed. All of the participants readily agreed to participate in this public exhibition, which would include screenings of their interviews, and they expressed their willingness to provide their own artwork to be exhibited to accompany their interviews. This situation, where the artists were willing to be recorded on video, in order to be both *seen* (the exception is the artist immi who does not disclose his identity and during the interview sat with his back to the camera) *and heard* by the viewer, is consistent with the manner in which the artists spontaneously shared their thoughts during their interviews, and it also reflects ways in which their thoughts had become transformed into the work of art that they exhibited. However, in Chapter

1/IV; Chapter 5/III I identify several questions that some artists wished to avoid answering, or where they hesitated before replying, as for example with questions concerning the financial assistance that had received while they were on their way to becoming established. I was also one of the interviewees, which allowed me to probe the questions' effectiveness and to identify the difficult questions for myself; this helped me to analyse the interview data.

In a style similar to anthropological fieldwork that requires a researcher to engage with the culture of the social group that is being studied (Silverman, 2006), my activity in 'the field', as a practicing visual artist, provided me with an understanding of the tasks the artists I studied undertook while producing their work, as well as the context in which they were practicing, including the external forces influencing them, the distribution of their work, and the mechanisms of consumption affecting not only the artists' sales but also their reputation and self-perceptions. Having adapted Bryman's (1988, pp.61-66) and Silverman's (2006, p.68) stages for the observation process conducted by the researcher-participant, I firstly experienced the visual artist's practice for myself, which gave my research a personal point of view since I then became, in effect, a participant of the population being researched. Secondly, I both collected and then described events that happened while working on my case studies, so as a practitioner I made detailed records of the practitioner's internal and external experiences within the context of the circumstances surrounding the practice. Thirdly, I managed to extract significant data and examine it, not only from the artist-practitioner's point of view, but also review it from sociological, economic and managerial points of view, and in an historical context, so that with all case studies I analysed I was able to take account of a wide range of practices employed by visual artists.

The data collected from the case studies included: field notes, email correspondence, documents from institutions (such as contracts and regulations/instructions), publications (such as catalogues and promotional materials) and video recordings made during the installation process, the details of the exhibition opening and of the final stages of the completion of the art work, as well as background information relating to the production of that work (including the evolution of the concept or idea). This data recorded details that gave an overview of the practical experience, while the visual observations recorded also contributed to the analysis of the outcomes of these case studies. My choice to collect data through these diverse methods allowed me, as an artist-researcher, to explain the artistic experience from the perspective of the art consumer and the art producer simultaneously.

Because I was able to switch roles (from that of an artist-producer to the audience) I had the opportunity, as a researcher, to find the correct identity (Sullivan, 2006, pp.82-85) through which to study specific aspects of artistic practices, and thus I was also able to see how these artistic productions (artworks and exhibitions) might be publicly received after they were completed. In my experience as an artist, the opinions of the public or other bodies is often not acknowledged, and even neglected partly as a result of systems operating within the art market and partly because artists, who already have to juggle many roles and responsibilities, are not interested in investing more effort to view the outcome of their productions from the audience's standpoint.

The roles I adopted during the practice-based research included those of artist, curator, manager, director, and audience. For example, in the case study *Eye Dreams* (2004) for which I took on the roles of curator, director and manager, while working with the artist, I began to realise why it was, during my first case study *The Flight* (2003), that the managers of event in which this work was exhibited, had burdened myself and other participating artists with seemingly unreasonable restrictions. It

seemed that this was largely due to the lack of management experience amongst the artists, and that this can often create time-consuming problems and extra work/ expense for the administration and human resources teams organizing such exhibitions. It is often the case that the institutions who provide the management teams that organize these exhibitions are aware of these potential problems (an awareness usually gained from previous experience of managing artists on previous occasions) so they lay down conditions for the artists in advance, as a preemptive measure, in order to streamline the managerial process and to minimize their administrative costs. The experience I gained by placing myself in these roles may provide the reader with a broader understanding not only of artists' personal conditions, but also of the context in which he/she is operating.

The interview questions I devised were all based on these considerations that were deduced from my practical observations and personal experiences of being an artist at the start of her career. Many of these observations raised questions about why it is that artists still continue to practice in these conditions, despite the obvious disadvantages they face as practitioners in these situations? Why are artists required to fulfill so many roles simultaneously, and how would it be possible to improve their performance without burdening them with additional tasks? These and many other questions are discussed in the case studies below, in Chapter 3.

The process of combining personal practice with qualitative research methods made me test my conventional understanding and practical experience on a wider population of contemporary artists. For example, the case studies highlighted a primary need for the acquisition, in advance, of managerial, administrative, and curatorial skills by the artists. Nevertheless, it was only after the completion of the more scientific research method – the interview analysis – that I was able to identify that in spite of the apparent lack of provision of training in these professional skills by education systems,

very often it is the artists themselves who underestimate the value of this kind of knowledge. Moreover, as the discussions of this subject progressed in the interviews I discovered that more than 90% of these artists agreed with the conclusion that I had reached during my own practice as an artist, namely that being a skilled and effective manager of your own career is one of the most important elements that helps an artist to become established. This contradiction (in which an artist understands the importance of self-management, but does not seek to acquire that knowledge) creates a further question, which is: Why do artists, who are aware of this, still neglect to seek out and study such an important subject? (as evidenced both by my practice and their answers in the interviews). I was reminded of Tom Wolfe's (1975, pp.9-18) cynical explanation that while on the one hand artists within their own communities affect the posture of not being swayed by the dictates of fashion, and do not prioritise financial wealth over artistic integrity, and claim to be dedicated to their work rather than seeking opportunities to distribute their work they are, on the other hand, also aware that to sell their work they must become fashionable in order to appeal to the taste of the 'bourgeoisie'. This situation can be directly responsible for the artists hesitation to declare their desperate need for business and marketing skills, and also why they are hesitant to explain that family and friends often supported them during their education and continued to do so through their establishment in order to continue to present an image of personal suffering for their art. Wolfe's explanation points to a complicated dilemma that is embedded within the hidden realities of artists' conditions, which I would not have discovered had I based my research objectives just on my own artistic and psychological points of view and experiences. But a methodology that I evolved from what has been described by Shaun McNiff (1998, p.22) as a 'dichotomy between practice and research' allowed me to reassess the knowledge I gained through the practice-based research.

## V. Deficiencies of chosen methodology

Practice-based PhD research requires an accurate prediction of the financial investment and the conditions involved in during the practical part of research. In non-practice based research an assessment of the monetary and time investment can be based on the previous experience of researchers. But in a practice-based PhD. this assessment is difficult to calculate as the artist's practice is as diverse and vague as its defining mechanisms.

In my experience, with individual art works and projects that were produced on an experimental basis it is not possible to estimate precisely the costs and or the time expenditure, or the conditions required before undertaking the artwork, and also there is no guarantee the research outcome will be positive, due to the unknown and unpredictable conditions surrounding such experimental practices. These factors may lead the researcher to stage more work than originally expected or to repeat the same project, and therefore to deviate from his/her schedule. Thus it is important to indicate that the time involved in incorporating the methodology and unifying both elements – that of the practice with the qualitative research – cannot be truly representative for all cases in the manner usually advocated in the curriculum of practice-based M.Phil./Ph.D. research methodologies.

Secondly, as a result of the additional consumption of time described above, together with incorporation of the case studies, the *financial expenditure* required for this research methodology was considerable. Indeed, it was on a scale very similar to the amount of money required by artists to set up their practice on a full-time basis at the beginning of their career. My living expenses in the UK (London and Brighton)

totalled approximately 15,600 GBP per year, in addition to which I had to add the production costs involved for each case study which I estimated as approximately 3000GBP each (which totals 15,000 GBP for the five case studies). As a result during the six years I spent conducting this research, from 2003 to 2008, I spent 93,600 GBP on basic living expenses, plus a total of 15,000 GBP on the five case studies, which amounts to an approximate total of 108,600 GBP that was required to complete this research.

This study could have been based on traditional research methods, for example by collecting only the interview material and the questionnaires, but then the research would lack the insider knowledge necessary and would not accurately reflect, or be less representative of, the reality of artists' practice. Equally, if the research gathered from survey was to be omitted and only the outcomes from the case studies were applied, the validity of the study would be confined mainly to personal, subjective experiences. In conclusion, I wish to state that I am much in favour of the methodology I selected for this study, but I wish to warn the reader and colleagues of the considerable costs of time and money involved in these types of practice-based research methods.

This kind of collaborative process in which methods are devised to inter-connect practice with traditional research methods is frequently discussed by the scholars who advocate art-based research (Gray and Malins, 2004; McNiff, 1998; Sullivan, 2005), and it has certainly created a more positive attitude towards the position of the artist amongst academics. Nevertheless, without a full understanding of the practical conditions confronting the artist's nature of practice it can be difficult to reach an accurate assessment of the finances and resources necessary for this kind of research as discussed, for example, by Gray and Malins (2004, p.84), because the conditions of artists' practices are often unpredictable and/or are based on individual practices. While I am satisfied with the outcomes arising from the application of the practice-



based research in this study, the achievement that has resulted from the combined methodologies discussed above had a detrimental effect on my personal life and on the lives of people who supported the production of this research. Thus, the typical time scale proposed for an M.Phil./ Ph.D. (Gray and Malins, 2004, pp.80-81) is not applicable to the practical components of this research and should therefore be revised by those institutions administrating a practice-based, structured M.Phil./ Ph.D.

After this discussion of the positive and negative outcomes of the chosen methodology for this study my next chapter analyses the outcome of the practice-based component, the case studies, which includes an analysis of the financial inadequacies experienced by early career artists and their effect on artists' production and morality.

### Chapter 3. Analysis of case studies

The previous chapter deals with the methodological background to the practical component of this study and explains the link between the practical component and the qualitative research conducted for this study. The research questions were extracted from the practice based case studies, and these in turn provided the basis for the interview questions, which were then further incorporated into the practical component of the thesis forming the sixth and final case study.

This chapter studies research questions extracted from these experiences regarding details of the external conditions that the artist confronted, and their effect on the artist's motivation, and the coping strategies that the artist devised as their career progressed. The research questions that were gleaned from the details of these artists' practice were then researched in greater depth via a series of semi-structured interviews with a broad population of both early career and established international artists based in the United Kingdom and America; an analysis of those interviews is presented in Chapter 4.

Common findings in the practice-based component of my research were the financial inadequacies faced by the artist at the beginning of his/her career, and the detrimental impact this can have on his/her artistic production, and how this can both de-motivate an artist and/or provoke unethical behaviour in the self-managed/self-employed artist.

## I. Artists' motives to create

In his research on the psychology of art motivation (what motivates the artistic person to do art), Shaun McNiff (1977, p.125) discusses some of the conscious drives and conflicts that might precipitate the creation of art and explains that 'no single existing theory can account for every aspect of art motivation' but 'when searching for the basic elements of artistic creativity, one is apt to find a primary human need for creative expression', and Karl Marx distinguished humans from animals by the ability to transform their material environment via creative practical activity (Wolff, 1993, p.14). My emphasis on the contemporary change in the meaning attributed to art, discussed in Chapter 1/I when I referred to the definition of art as *high skills* of production and *creative skills*, is similar to the social construction of work: we make work up, define it and reproduce it through our own actions, although we often have very little choice about how these processes take place (Erickson, 2009, p.116). This wider sociological and historical context and construction of human creativity presents a shift to the labour of creative artists, referenced by Hannah Arendt (1959), stretching as far back as to the ancient Greeks and Romans. Nowadays, art/artists' status in contemporary consumer society is diversified and confusing, but it nevertheless still 'is important to individual's identity, to how they make sense of themselves in the world around them' (Erickson, 2009, pp.117-119).

Therefore, I am attempting to step beyond an examination of the psychological motivations of artists to create art in order to discover how artists' motivations are influenced by external or sociological and practical conditions, and then to see how they influence artists' decisions to create and deliver their craft to the public. As explained in the methodology in Chapter 2, based on the six case studies I have experienced, five major external factors that affect the artist's motivations were

identified, especially at the beginning of their career path – including *before* they begin creating their work, *while* they are creating it, and *during* the stage when they present their art work to the public.

First and foremost, I believe that the condition that has the most impact on the artist's creative process is the haphazard and inadequate system of financial reward that currently exists in the contemporary visual art market, which means in effect that a self-employed visual artist finds it virtually impossible to earn a sufficient income from their creative work and activity. All five case studies clearly demonstrate that artists are expected to invest considerable personal financial resources before they reach a position where they can sell their work, and/or they have to seek financial support from elsewhere for an indeterminate length of time, until they achieve financial stability through the sale of their work. This is different from other professions in which either a salary scale or financial benefits like pension provision may be at least expected over a particular timescale.

Secondly, there is no clearly delineated professional structure or knowledge that is freely available relating to the self-employed visual artist's professional development within the contemporary art market, that might act as a guide for the artist who is beginning his/her career, and would enable them to choose the most appropriate path towards becoming established. Thirdly, managers of arts institutions and organisations and also the individuals working within the visual art market can have a significant influence on the motivation and creative process of an artist who lacks guidelines or a predictable career path.

Each artist's personal situation can affect his/her motivation to become part of a team, or to collaborate with others, because this is, in general, not a common practice for the fine arts artists who often follow a studio practice on their own. The process of exhibiting that might well involve collaboration can offer a daunting challenge, both

professionally and personally, to an artist, and such scenarios cannot be realistically assessed beforehand, so that if the experience has a negative outcome it could seriously affect the artist's motivation to work in a similar context in the future.

Finally, as stated above, these adverse conditions can have a sustained influence on the artist's motivation and their methods of production. And these conditions may in turn provoke artists to pursue extreme lifestyles and modes of operation, and force them into attempts to manipulate the market by involving themselves in morally or ethically questionable enterprises for the purposes self-promotion, and thus possibly degrading themselves and others in the name of 'art'.

## II. Artists' financial inadequacy in contemporary visual art markets

The total cost of producing the five practice-based case studies amounted to 15,000 GBP over the five years of research, from 2003-2008. This sum includes expenses incurred during the management, production, and exhibition of these artworks and the events related to them. Not included in this total is the time spent on developing and finalizing the projects, approximately 3-5 months of full-time work in each individual case, which makes an overall total of 15-25 months of unpaid work, in addition to the financial investment required for the production of these creations. According to Howard Becker (1982, pp.69-92) making art of any kind requires resources that become available for artists on a demand/supply basis (including materials or human resources) and artists use the supply of what is available in the market or invent their own exclusive resources. Either way requires artists to look for and identify these resources. An estimation of exactly how much will be needed is determined by the artist and the artwork and by the conditions required for production (the medium: the

materials, the methods of execution of the work, the installation arrangements needed for the work such as framing, carriage, and hire of display personnel) in addition to the subsistence costs of the artist during the production and distribution of the works and/or its storage). These costs will differ from one project to the other and depend on the nature of the project and the artist's specifications and personal conditions.

Michael Baxandall ([1972]1988) in his book *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* points out that artists' commissions were commonly funded in advance of production. The prevailing practice of commissioning a work of art was via an agreement that often included specifications for materials and labor used in the production of the work. In some cases even the quality of paint would be specified (Baxandall, [1972] 1988, p.6). Nowadays early career visual artists are responsible not only for funding their own education but must also fund their own projects after graduation (for a length of time and for a financial outlay which cannot be properly estimated) until a potential sponsor or commissioning body decides to invest in their art production. However, in 16<sup>th</sup> century Italy, Vasari ([1568]1991), the Renaissance artist and historian who was a friend of Michelangelo, described how the artists' work was supported by commissions from patrons the payment for which was agreed in advance of the artwork's production. These commissions, while they provided artists with a secure income, which supported their professional development, often subjected the artist to greater control from the commissioner, whereas in comparison contemporary artists have, more or less, total freedom of expression (conceptually and in media applied in the work). Nevertheless, when I participated in the Kaohsiung Container Art Festival 2003 with my site-specific installation *The Flight* (2003), I experienced more control (both in my conceptual thinking, and in the production of my artwork) than I had anticipated. The Festival's management became involved in the conceptual 'framing' of my art work, and influenced it indirectly via their financial arrangements

with the result that I did not receive a proper salary for my work, so I was obliged to draw on my own meager resources (in terms of time as well as money), while the professional benefits I received from my participation were simply two pages in the catalogue describing my art work in Mandarin Chinese and English languages:

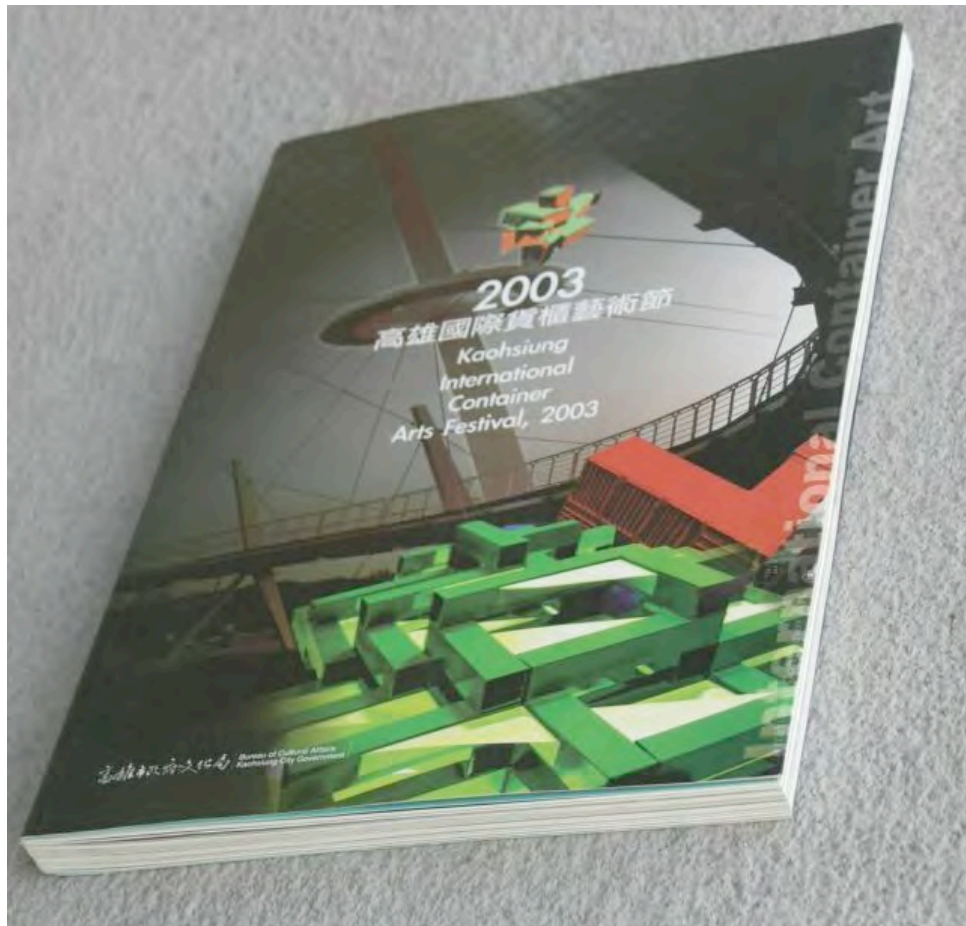
Image not available due to copyright restrictions

Case study 1. A Description of the installation, *The Flight* (2003), Kaohsiung International Container Arts Festival (2003) catalogue, p.98.

Image not available due to copyright restrictions

Case study 1. A Description of the installation, *The Flight* (2003), Kaohsiung International Container Arts Festival (2003) catalogue, p.99.





Case study 1. Overview of the 2003 Kaohsiung International Container Arts Festival catalogue.

Another benefit I received from working for the festival was positive feedback from the exhibition's management employees who worked for the festival organisers, which was a personal achievement for me as an artist and stimulated me to continue working despite the lack of salary from the work:

‘At first, people did not know how to enjoy themselves with the parachute. But as soon as the first one tried it, the others were eager to experience it as well. And there was even a queue in front of the container. I chatted with some kids one or two of them had already tried the parachute three times!

What is interesting is that I introduced your installation to my professor who visited Kaohsiung the other day and I even had her on the parachute. It was fun!’

Liya Wang,

Artist’s Assistant at the Kaohsiung Container Arts Festival, Business  
correspondence, 2004

[email] to N., Dimitriadi, January 2004

‘The audience love our installation and one bottle of the smoke liquid has been used up already. The effect of the smoke and the feeling of the flying keeps people waiting in lines on the weekends. Good job!’

Chapman Kuo, Kaohsiung Container Art Festival Coordinator,  
Business correspondence, 2003

[email] message to N., Dimitriadi, December 2003

In addition, a website reference from the Taipei Times newspaper improved my CV (Taipei Times, 2004). This is important for the professional establishment of any earlier career artist because the majority of exhibitions require the artist’s CV with a list of their exhibitions, and publications about their work; it not only gives the art organisation reassurance of the quality of the artist’s production but security that the artist is trustworthy to deliver projects professionally, and also provides reference for the organisation’s publications.

Despite these benefits, in many ways it seems doubtful that the professional conditions facing contemporary artists are much of an improvement on those experienced by the Renaissance artists, who were at least guaranteed subsistence as apprentices.

As stated above, in my first case study *The Flight* (2003) the costs of production, including materials, the input of my time, and other managerial issues were predetermined by the organizers, who stipulated that the budget must not be exceeded, and the participating artist must cover any additional expenditure incurred.

### Budget Plan for Material Expenditures

Material Expenditures			
Item	Cost Estimate (Taiwan \$)	Percentage	Note
Parachutes	10,900	6%	2 pieces
Rubber ropes	5,400	3%	3 rolls for hanging the parachutes
Hooks	2,700	1%	4 hooks (to attach the parachutes to the ceiling)
spot lights with clips	5,400	3%	4 pieces
cold cathode fluorescent lights (incl. bases)	21,800	12%	14 pieces
Glass (plastic) pieces for the floor of the container	41,000	22%	
Smoke/ artificial generators (2-4 pieces) for creating clouds	27,000	14%	
Cardboard	2,100	1%	
Printing expenses	21,800	12%	
<b>Travel Expenses:</b>			
Flight tickets to Taiwan	38,300	20%	includes possible overweight charge of carrying some materials
Transfer expenses from Taipei airport to the city centre (and vice-versa)	3,200	2%	
Flight ticket from Taipei to Kaohsiung	8,200	4%	includes possible overweight charge of carrying some materials
Travel expenses from Kaohsiung airport to place of residence provided by festival organizers (and vice-versa)	1,600	1%	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>189,400</b>	<b>100%</b>	

Note: The cost of materials and travel may fluctuate by 20% depending on the country of purchase.

Case study 3. *The Flight* (2003). Installation budget approved by the festival organisers

Therefore, the artists taking part had to tailor their conceptual and creative visions to the budget provided and stipulated by the exhibition's regulations as described in the festival's curatorial concept and within the terms of the contract signed by the organizers and participating artist (CD, Additional material, Case study 1, Festival's Contract and the Concept).

Thus, these financial and managerial restrictions had an impact on the artists' selection of materials, technical equipment, and installation arrangements. As a result, in my case, I decided to purchase most of materials which I knew would be difficult to find at the festival's location (Kaohsiung City, Taiwan) beforehand with my own money, and I was reimbursed for these expenses from the Festival's installation budget one month later, after providing the festival's accountant with stamped receipts. My expenses included the parachute I bought for the installation, which was US\$300, additional costs for airfreight to transfer it to Taiwan which was US\$300, the return air tickets Moscow to Taipei which was US\$1200, and the return air fare from Taipei to Kaohsiung which cost US\$200. In addition to this the cost of preparing the proposal was US\$200, and sending it to the organizers via special delivery was US\$100. All of these expenses amounted to a total US\$2300 of my own money that I was obliged to spend before receiving any reimbursement (and this does not include a number of essential petty expenses which can appear unexpectedly, such as taxis, meals, accommodation, telephone, and internet access in a foreign country).

The signing of the contract between the artists and organizers was delayed due to problems within the Festival's administration and a shortage of interpreters. I received my contract only a month before the Festival was due to open while I was already traveling to prepare some of the installation's parts I therefore asked my friend to sign the contract on my behalf and to fax it to the Festival's administrators (it was more than

10 pages) to avoid paying for special delivery again. Even so the Festival organizers (in order to protect themselves legally) had warned artists that they should not purchase travel tickets or any materials for their installation before signing their contract. The inadequate schedule for these arrangements on the part of the Festival's management put me and other participating artists in an awkward situation – so we were forced to start spending our own money on air tickets and the materials we needed before signing the contract because it became too risky to have to make these arrangements at such short notice. All of us just hoped that everything would work out, that the contract would be signed and agreed, and that the risks would then evaporate. However, a group of artists, the *United Transnational Republic* (United Transnational Republic, 2007), refused to participate in the festival because of the unfair conditions posed by the festival organisers:

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for sending the Contract Draft.

We started our work with great enthusiasm: most of our texts are translated into the Chinese language; an architectural work for the container is on its way (see attached pictures).

Unfortunately, the Contract Draft is causing quite some disturbance and is slowing down our enthusiasm, as it seemingly is a 10-page convolute of restrictions, rules and reasons why the Artist potentially will not be reimbursed by the Museum for the Materials. Production, Traveling and Stipend Fees.

We don't feel that the Contract Draft is equally protecting the interest of both the Museum and the Artist. While the Contract Draft is a long list of the Artist's obligations, little is said about the Museum's

obligations. For example, the Contract Draft goes into great details such as stating that the artist has to leave Taiwan no longer than 10 days after the installation period in order to get the airplane ticket reimbursed, but not a single word is lost, at which time the Museum will pay the traveling fee to the Artist. Likewise, many rules are stated under which the Artist has to claim the production/material fee, but it is not mentioned when (and therefore if at all) the Museum shall reimburse the expenses.

There seem to be many rules allowing the Museum to deny the payments: not in the original budget plan, miscalculation of expenses for “non-consumptive products”, receipts dated after December 20<sup>th</sup>, subcontracted to a third party, failing to correct a flaw within a deadline, failing the Work examination on December 11<sup>th</sup>...

The limitation of the budget to “consumptive products” (a very imprecise term) could potentially mean, that none of our expenses will be reimbursed. We are intending to buy a container, stainless steel sheet metal, screws, lights, furniture, office equipment...All of these items could potentially be termed “non-consumptive”, resulting in the Museum to deny the payment. Also, you are asking us to stay in Kaohsiung for the whole period of the festival, while the Contract Draft is demanding us to leave no later than 10 days after the installation period. On addition to all these uncertainties, the Contract Draft is listing a lot of unknown expenses to be paid by the Artist: insurances, electricity, water, internet, damage caused by conditions not covered by the insurance policy or contract (which is unknown to

the Artist!), any additional certificate or document demanded by the Museum...

Considering the expenses for internet, electricity and water I suggest that the Museum is either providing these items to the Artist at no additional cost or tells the Artist, at which costs the Artist can buy these services. In order for us to be able to creatively continue our work, we suggest to develop a Contract that equally protects the Artist and the Museum. At the moment, we have the unpleasant feeling of working on Administration Art only.

Attached find a revised version of the Contract Draft.

Georg Zoche,

United Transnational Republic, Business correspondence, 2003

[email] message to N., Dimitriadi, November 2003

However, many artists I spoke to during the installation process at the festival location explained to me that the conditions the festival organisers were providing to the artists were much better and fairer than a lot of other festivals in which they were participating, and therefore the demands from the *United Transnational Republic* on the festival organisers' conditions were unnecessarily protective:

Hi there,

I already signed the contract with the Museum on Monday, November 10 and faxed it straight back to them. If you have enough confidence in your own project, its feasibility and first of all your own capabilities, I suggest you do the same.

If you don't, don't.

Apart from that I rather not receive any more emails other than from the organizers of the Kaohsiung Festival.

My apologies for sending this out to all of you, but the whole fuss was getting on my nerves a bit.

Looking forward to meeting you in Kaohsiung,

Stephan

Stephan Housmeister, Participating artist, Business correspondence, 2003 [email]  
message to N., Dimitriadi, November 2003

Regardless that many festivals provide unfair conditions for the exhibiting artists, I agree with the *United Transnational Republic* that the contract was unfair towards all of us and by signing it I allowed myself to be in a legally dangerous situation. Yet, similarly to Stephan Housmeister, as explained in his email above, I was confident in my project and hoped it would work without any problems. Fortunately, I did, but in Case study 3, *The Exhausted Body* (2005) as further explained in this chapter, there were unfortunate problems that resulted from the unfair contract. In both cases I agreed to sign the contract instead of refusing to participate and thus lose the time and effort I already invested in the preparations, as did the *United Transnational Republic*:

We have not signed the contract and will not do so, unless some critical points are changed. This is certainly not due to lack of confidence in our project (as you are suggesting), but stems from the fact that I cannot sign such one-sided contracts.

According to the contract, the Museum does not even have to pay the Artist at all, but can request - in the case of an artistic "flaw" in the artist's work unlimited compensation from the Artist.

While it may be, that everything might be handled smoothly by the Museum, it also is a possibility that the contract will be used against you. In that case you have no position to claim anything from the Museum. One must keep in mind, that the people who wrote that contract will also check, whether it was fulfilled, and in the case of a dispute we all would have to deal with the very same people who wrote that contract.

Georg Zoche, United Transnational Republic, Business correspondence, 2003 [email]  
message to N., Dimitriadi, 12 November 2003.

The fact that they quit meant that all those artists, by investing a great deal of time in drafting their proposal as well as in mail and email correspondence with the festival's management, had wasted a lot of their time and resources, and were not reimbursed, while on the other hand the festival's management continued to receive a salary from the organization employing them. So those artists, including myself, who chose to accept all



the conditions imposed by the contract did so because we were afraid of losing the opportunity to participate in the festival and to develop the work in which we had already invested.

The preparation of the concept and the proposal, and dealing with various administrative issues took nearly two months of full-time work, and the time involved with the actual production, transportation, and the installation took over one month of full-time work. The salary paid to an artist for the production of the installation was US\$1200 (and when this was converted from Taiwanese dollars into GBP I lost a significant amount of money due to the exchange rate and bank charges).

To conclude, the salary of US\$1200 that I was paid by the Festival did not provide adequate remuneration for the amount of personal expenditure that was required in addition to the other financial risks that were involved in producing *The Flight* (2003) installation. Despite the success of my installation, the publicity I received, and the enthusiastic response to my work from the public, I subsequently reached the conclusion that if I had been aware of all of these conditions beforehand, I would have devised a technically much simpler installation, which would have consumed less time, effort, and materials to produce. Or else I might have considered trying to charge the organizers for the costs of materials by providing fraudulent receipts for sums more than their real cost, and in so doing so I would then be able to raise additional money for my salary by reassigning money from the budget allocated for the materials which was approximately US\$5000. The result of such a strategy would mean that quite apart from providing work of lower quality, I would also be engaging in deception or fraud towards the Festival organizers in an effort to raise barely adequate financial income in order to be able to afford to provide the artwork in the first place. According to the sociologist Howard Becker (1982, p.75) ‘An artist without money can steal; successful artists often admit, or brag, that they stole in their

less successful days' and he gives example of how his photography teacher told his students to steal photographic paper to be able to produce work when they did not have any money. The only way I was able to complete this practice without committing a criminal offence, as described by Becker, was to find money from friends and relatives to spend in advance, which I consider as exploitative of me, my friends, and my family, while the Festival organizers on the other hand do not consider such exploitation to be a crime.

In a way that was similar to that of the *Flight*, the exhibition in which my case study *The Exhausted Body* (2005) was included faced more extreme financial and managerial constraints, due to the conditions imposed by the museum's program. A freelance artist-curator or art curator was invited by the museum for their program *Forum for Creativity* (CD, Additional materials, Case study 3, Forum Guidelines) to organise an exhibition at the Kaohsiung Fine Arts Museum, Taiwan. To be selected for this occasion the independent curator (or the artist undertaking the curator's role) needed to produce a proposal for the exhibition and to present it in person to the museum and defend it at a hearing held by the museum's committee. The curators who applied had to cover their own travel expenses to take part in this selection process – the equivalent of US\$1500 for air transport, alone, to the museum's location. After being selected, and after a period of three months, the dates for the exhibition of the artworks (3 month duration) are then determined. And in a way that was similar but even worse than the previous situation, the exhibition contract was sent to me only one month before the installation date and to this day I have not yet received any English translation of this document (CD, Additional materials, Case study 3, Contract). I purchased my second set of flight tickets (another US\$1500) making the total costs for airfares at US\$3000. Only my second set of flight tickets were reimbursed, and not until after completing the installation and returning back to London (the boarding

passes were the proof required by the museum administration to submit to their accountant to cover my flight costs).

After I received a verbal interpretation of the contract, I understood that the costs of the inland transportation of the artworks would be covered by the museum, but that the curator (myself) must cover the cost of the transportation of the works into the country (Taiwan). As I was aware of this regulation after reading the general description of the program I selected the works of artists (that included media, such as films, photographs, and small paintings) on the grounds that these would be easy to transfer to the location and install in the museum, therefore minimalising the transportation costs from London to Taiwan. This restriction therefore affected the kind of artwork I could offer, and also had a negative impact on my motivation to deliver work I was really interested in exhibiting in the project.



Case study 3. *The Exhausted Body* (2005). Exhibition curated by Nina11 Dimitriadi.

Kaohsiung Fine Arts Museum, Taiwan.



Case study 3. *The Exhausted Body* (2005). Exhibition curated by Nina11 Dimitriadi.  
Kaohsiung Fine Arts Museum, Taiwan.

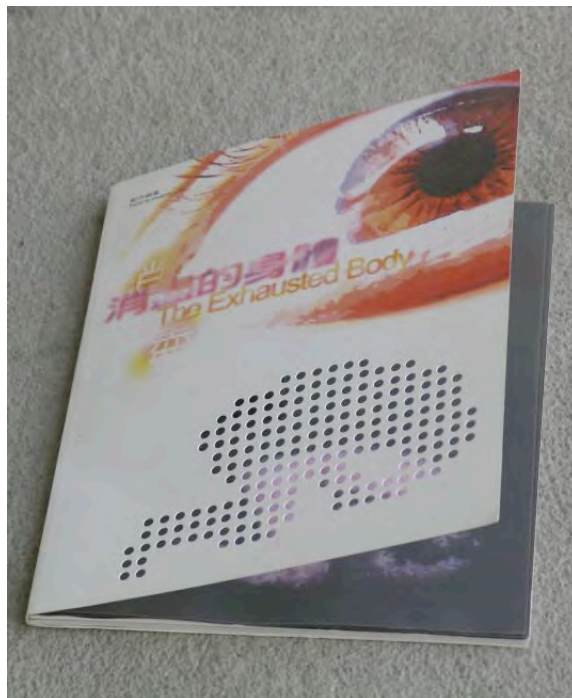


Case study 3. *The Exhausted Body* (2005). Exhibition curated by Nina11 Dimitriadi.  
Kaohsiung Fine Arts Museum, Taiwan. Large-scale installation by Norbert Francis  
Attard *Re Cycle* (2005), video projection, water, sofa, TV monitor.

Despite the fact that the cost of installing the artworks I exhibited was covered by the museum, I was never offered a detailed written account of the allowable expenses for the installation of the exhibition in the English language, so that the fees the museum's employees or the contractors were charging to my exhibition budget for the installation costs, were, in my view, often questionable. It was also my personal responsibility, as the exhibition's curator/organizer, to cover any additional costs for equipment hire and installation of my artwork that might be required. In one of my disputes with museum management, my concern was that when the Museum did not have four video projectors and two television monitors (because they had organised another video exhibition at the same time which had taken up all of their technical equipment) it became my responsibility to find other projectors and technical equipment for my installation, the hire of which amounted to GBP3000 for a three month period. I also discovered in the contract (via an interpreter) that the museum was prepared to pay for one week of hotel accommodation and the inland transportation of all of the exhibiting nine artists. But this information only became available one month before the exhibition was due to open, and by this time it was too late to invite the artists. I then asked the museum authorities to transfer this budget cost towards paying for the technical equipment I needed, rather than have to pay this expense from my own pocket. I was informed that the Museum Director was the only person who could make a decision on this matter, and at the time he was in Chicago opening another exhibition. I therefore had to wait until two weeks before the exhibition opening before I got a reply to my request.

This situation took place in an environment where I had been present a few years previously (during the Container Festival) so I already knew a lot of people who were able to help and advise me on various questions, such as finding cheap accommodation

since the museum was covering only one week of hotel expenses, an insufficient period of time to manage a large scale international exhibition. Thus in addition to US\$3000 (US\$1500 of which I was reimbursed later) I spent a considerable amount of my own money on equipment, food, accommodations and other essential items. The preparation and administration of the show took me five months of full-time work, and in return I received only a few copies of the exhibition catalogue (those remaining from 500 copies allocated they gave to my friend in Taipei because the museum did not want to cover the expense of sending copies abroad). I put together this 46 page catalogue primarily by myself with help from artist Zeyno Dagli, and using written material about the participating artists from other exhibitions (CD, Additional materials, Case study 3, Catalogue); for this service I was paid approximately GBP600 by the museum (organising and editing the text of the catalogue took approximately a month excluding setting the design, which was done by the museum). This was the only salary I received from this project.



Case study 3. *The Exhausted Body* (2005) Exhibition catalogue. Curated by Nina I I Dimitriadi. Kaohsiung Fine Arts Museum, Taiwan.

In conclusion, the amount of personal time and money an artist needs to invest at the beginning of their career to gain the necessary credentials in order to enhance a CV, or to create artwork, and to gain the necessary artistic experience, is very difficult to find without generous support from donors, sponsors, family, or friends, and to find sponsorship for their projects is well nigh impossible, without dedicating extra time to searching for funds, and without specific knowledge of fundraising – a subject which is not usually included in the curricula of most art colleges. Therefore, for a beginning artist who is not yet established, it is very likely that both the production and delivery of their craft will rely solely on their personal financial resources, with the hope that it will yield some reward at some future, unknown, point in the artist's future. This is something that I am still waiting to happen after investing a considerable amount of time and money for six years in my artistic career.

### III. Institutional and human factors affecting artists' decision-making, and the art institution's detachment from the public

*“The Artist's creativity depends to a large extent on the institutional setting within which an artist acts.” (Frey, 2003, p.144)*

This section will look at some of the forces operating within art institutions, and the ways in which individuals working within these institutions may affect the artist's motivation and modes of production.

The financial instability of the artist working within organisations who tend to recruit an artist's labour at marginal cost (Frey, 2003) and the necessity for many artists

to seek financial support from their family or to seek alternative employment as a source of income (Abbing, 2002, p.143) are not the only factors found to affect an artist's motivation to produce quality work or to participate in artistic events. The particular culture of the art organisation within which the artist exhibits, and the skills and qualifications of its personnel as well as straightforward human factors can also play an important role in artists' motivation to deliver work of quality. On the other hand, the artist's personal characteristics, such as their self-management skills and their potential to collaborate are equally important elements for their successful professional practice.

Early career artists frequently have a poor understanding of ways in which the personnel of publicly or privately subsidised art organisations operate. Often the diverse identities and motives of the individual 'actors' within the organization can affect organizational behavior (Sifakakis, 2002, p.78; Silverman, 1970, p. 68) and without the benefit of any detailed analyses of their effects on social relations, the behavior of the organization, and on the individuals operating within it (Friedland and Alford, 1991, p.252) it is difficult to gauge an accurate assessment of their wider impact on the stakeholders involved: '...when it comes to research on art, these actors, practices, and discourses have been ignored, and this ignorance is common to the theoretical problems and to the partialities of existing explanations of contemporary art' (Sifakakis, 2002, p.79).

In my experience as a practicing artist I have found there is a widely held assumption that the artistic curator and the director are the most influential people working within a public art organization – and that these individuals each play a key role in selecting particular artists and their work for public exhibitions, or at the very least may recommend an artist to others able to promote their art work elsewhere. Therefore, if an artist is personally acquainted with these professionals (or is connected



with someone who can provide a recommendation) then it's assumed that this can be advantageous to the artist for promotion of their work in the public art sphere. Similarly in commercial art organisations, if an artist has access to the director or owner of a commercial art organisation such as a gallery or to an independent art dealer or art consultant it is assumed that this will be a significant aid to the artist's promotion and career development. I will now discuss these assumptions and some of the realities, and I will offer a personal explanation derived from my own practice while creating the case study *The Exhausted Body Exhibition* (2005) as a primary source of information.

While artists seek to make connections with directors, curators, art dealers in order to promote their work, at the same time art dealers are searching for artists with a suitable personality, a specific age, and a nationality, rather than positioning the artworks as the main criteria for selecting the artists (Klein, 1993, p.3). For a dealer an artist's personality is an important component 'because the relationship with artist is ideally a life-long one. Therefore dealers look for trustworthiness and honesty in an artist, since most of the business in the art world is done by handshake' (ibid).

However, Sir Allan Bowness (1989), who was director of Tate Gallery for nine years (1980-1988), does not agree with this point of view. In his book *Condition of Success* (Bowness, 1989) he describes the stages of recognition of the modernist artist as evolving through the four following circles: through *peer recognition* (when the artist's colleagues, between themselves come to recognize his/her as an artist), to *critical recognition* (the stage when established critics are praising the artist's work), and to *patronage* by dealers and collectors (with art sales and commissions from the private sector), and finally to *public acclaim*, when the artist receives widespread praise by the public in general (ibid). The author believes that even nowadays there has been no major change in this pattern of recognition of artists, and that it takes about 25 years for an exceptional artist to win public recognition (Bowness, 1989, pp.49-50). The way

he selected the work of contemporary artists to be purchased for the UK Arts Council's collection (a publicly subsidised organisation) reflected contemporary changes in those four different stages of recognition. He visited the annual exhibition of the *London Group* and selected the work of a 22-year-old unknown artist, a student at Royal College of Art, the young David Hockney. Bowness wrote: 'In other words, it was quite obvious to a forty-year-old painter/teacher like Gowing and to a thirty-year-old art historian/art critic like myself that here was an exceptional talent.' Bowness also expresses his envy of Charles and Doris Saatchi's modes of selection of artists' work, in that they are able to buy any artwork for their collection without financial restrictions because they were spending their own money, thus making the Saatchis highly desirable patrons for any artist (Bowness, 1989, pp.37). These examples of modes of selection of artists' work, for both public and private sector collections, demonstrate that despite Bowness' theory of the twenty-five year period of public recognition for the exceptional artist, the path of recognition for contemporary artists today has changed. An artist's promotion can be accelerated by individuals who have achieved a high level of influence on the public and on public and private art collections (Stallabrass, 1999). The 'critical recognition' (as Bowness terms it) can be fabricated (Stallabrass, 1999; Thornton, 2008) whereby public acclaim is inserted into the present history of art by the manipulation and influence of individuals operating within the art market. Moreover Bowness' last stage of recognition, 'public acclaim', has nowadays mutated into 'the public institution's acclaim' of the artist, so that his definition of the artist's patterns of success in the past, along with their other conditions *are now no longer comparable to those experienced by the artist today.*

Sifakakis' (2002, pp.164-165) research demonstrates how the hierarchy that commonly exists in a public gallery (such as with the art organisation's Director and its Exhibition Curator) is primarily responsible for the selection, promotion and exhibition

of the work of artists. This confirms my personal observations of how artists need to establish personal connections with these professionals who run art organisations, as discussed above. But in order to evaluate realistically the benefits that participation in a public institution's event can bring to an artist, I wanted to go a step further and investigate what happens when an artist has already gained access to an art institution's Director and Curator, and when they are selected to exhibit at that institution (gallery or museum).

During my participation in the first case study *The Flight* (2003) at Kaohsiung Container Art Festival, Taiwan I met with the Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts curator Fangling Tseng, though I personally did not initiate this meeting. I discovered that she knew an artist Dr. Yung-Hsien Cheng, who had been my colleague and friend since 1999 when I became a fellow student of his at Goldsmiths College, London. Dr. Yung Hsien Cheng exhibited his installation *Heart Sutra documentary film* (2002) at the Kaohsiung Container Art Festival in 2001 (and it was from him that I first heard about the festival) and he also studied for his Ph.D. at the School of Arts and Communication, at the University of Brighton. The curator Fangling Tseng told me that she knew his work and that she had read the articles he wrote for *Artist Magazine* published in Taiwan. Fangling Tseng then gave me a verbal invitation to participate as a curator in the Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts *Forum for Creativity Programme* and to curate a solo exhibition of Chen's work. Subsequently Dr. Yung-Hsien Chen advised me to combine his work with that of other artists for this exhibition. I followed his advice and created a concept-based exhibition of work by international artists including myself, comprising of artworks focusing on the human body, or objects relating to it (CD, Additional materials, Case study 3, Catalogue). Fangling Tseng then advised me to find another international museum that would agree to collaborate with. This collaboration would then upgrade the status of my exhibition from the *Forum for*

*Creativity* to that of an ‘international exhibition’ in order to elicit a larger public subsidy from the Taiwanese public art funding organisation.

For over 18 months I searched for a museum that would take my exhibition, and some of these museums I visited in person. They included MUAR (Schusev Museum of Architecture, Moscow), MMOMA (Moscow Museum of Contemporary Art), and SMCA (State Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki, Greece). The reason I approached these institutions was because I had received personal introductions to pass on to their personnel. All of these recommendations led me either to their Directors or Program Curators which confirmed Sifakakis’s (2004) finding – that of the hierarchy of the decision making in a contemporary public art organisation and also with the general perception of how artists are channelled towards the Curator-Director. However, some of the museums also needed a decision from their Board of Trustees or their Selection Panel before they could agree to stage an exhibition, and an overall agreement was more likely if the primary recommendation for the exhibition came from the Curator or the Director of the organization. In addition, another of my reasons for selecting these organisations for my exhibition was because of their location, their geographical position, because I would have been able to stay with family members free of charge, and would also be able to store the art works in their apartments. The SMCA (The State Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki, Greece) expressed interest in staging my exhibition and advised me about the process of submitting the exhibition proposal. My next step was to send all the requisite information to Fangling Tseng, the Kaohsiung Museum’s curator so either she or the Director of the museum could formally invite the SMCA to collaborate.

However, it appeared that this never happened. Fangling Tseng neither sent the invitation to the SMCA nor told me that it was not going to be processed. (As I later found out, the newly appointed Director of Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts did not

show an interest in pursuing the matter of my exhibition further.) My very considerable frustration at so much wasted time and effort had an influence on my work while I was developing the exhibition to participate in this exhibition. I had spent so much of my own resources to little effect, and I later understood that the two most ‘influential’ personnel at the Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts with whom I was personally acquainted had summarily dismissed my efforts. This was only the beginning of a series of aggravations.

The assistant who had been appointed to manage the administrative process and my exhibition installation could not communicate in English at even a basic level, which caused many misunderstandings and problems during the collaboration. Moreover, this person was also appointed to manage the administration of yet another two exhibitions that were opening at the museum at the same time as my exhibition.

However, I had to wait for the Museum Director’s return from USA because with Curator Fangling Tseng he had been opening a large exhibition in Chicago and without him a decision could not be made. One week before my exhibition opening I received an email stating that the Director had returned to Kaohsiung and was considering my request, which was later accepted.

As mentioned above, another area of contention was that I felt that the Kaohsiung Museum did, and had not, considered the requirements of their public and visitors. The titles of the art works and the exhibition concept were placed on signs next to the entrance to the exhibition, and all of these, and also the catalogue were printed in the smallest possible font size (DVD film, Case study 3; CD, Additional materials, Case study 3, Catalogue) so that they were very difficult to read. In spite of my frequent comments on this problem nothing was done to rectify this.

Furthermore, no explanations of the exhibited work were printed out and displayed (apart from titles), which might have enhanced the viewer’s understanding of

the conceptual artworks. Explanations were provided in a catalogue that was made available only after the exhibition was over. Therefore the audience who visited was left to guess, or to interpret the works by themselves, and this, sadly, is very often the case in contemporary art exhibitions. Because of the huge workload in setting up the exhibition I was exhausted, and I am sure that the personnel assisting the exhibition management were exhausted as well, to the extent that a concern about public's understanding of works became a low priority. In addition, the opening of the exhibition (which included my hour-long performance creating three *Self-Portraits* (DVD film, Case study 5) was scheduled for 11am on a weekday, which meant that it was impossible for the general public to attend it. I felt that the schedule was created to suit the museum's management, so they could avoid spending additional time out of the regular working hours. Finally, the press conference consisted of one journalist from the religious radio station, and the 'discussion panel' meeting dealt with subjects unrelated to the exhibition, or to matters of public interest.

Overall I feel that Sifakakis' (2002, pp.174-5) analysis of the 'irrelevance of the audience and local community in the framework of the...(art institution's)... strong orientations towards specialist, peer art-professional, international and global contexts for recognition was even more pronounced and clear cut...' is particularly relevant to this case. It is insulting to the public when an institution that is subsidised by taxpayer's money produces art that is irrelevant to the community from whom they derive their subsidy. However, it is because of the mismanagement of the Museum's curator and director that their staff becomes burdened with a responsibility to produce multiple exhibitions rather than to produce a few of quality. The stress caused by having to deal with the kind of extreme situations as described in *The Exhausted Body* (2005) exhibition also has the effect of putting extra pressure on all the personnel as

well as myself as an artist/curator, which has the ultimate effect of creating apathy and alienation between us, the exhibitors and the public.

On the one hand I was paying for this experience with money lent or donated to me by friends and relatives who believe in my artistic practice, and I was also investing my time and free labour to stage the event, while on the other hand the museum's personnel were paid salaries out of public budget for their work, and in addition the museum's chief personnel arrived from an event in America where they promoting the museum and Taiwanese artists in the middle of the installation process of my exhibition and thus were too busy to deal with a problematic situation within their institution, which no one else had been empowered to make a decision about.

After my return to UK I attended an Intellectual Property – Protecting Your Research seminar (8 November 2005, room M228) at the University of Brighton where I explained the situation to the seminar's leader. I was told that I should not sign the contract that was written in Chinese, in spite of the time pressure and other pressures from the organizers. Therefore, I became legally responsible and culpable since I had positioned myself in these circumstances, when in fact I should have declined to participate because of the inadequate management from the museum at the first place.

In my opinion, this result cannot be considered as a successful outcome or a worthwhile contribution to an artist's career. In the case of this particular exhibition the amount of time and stress involved together with the irrelevance of the exhibition to the local public, forced me to confront some serious inadequacies prevalent in many contemporary public arts organisations. As a practicing artist, I discovered that my ambitions unfortunately appeared to have very little in common with the ambitions of the curator and director of the institution who had invited me to collaborate. Moreover, the situation I experienced was primarily my own responsibility, which I should not have become involved with in the first place according the legal advice I received.

However, my lack of experience in dealing with such situations and the risk of losing many hours of my work in this case obliged me to acquiesce with the abuse and risks I experienced. This is common practice for artists who are at an early stage of their career, and will be further discussed below.

#### IV. Professional and ‘unprofessional mavericks’

*‘Imagine, a canonical artist, fully prepared to produce, and fully capable of producing, the canonical art work. Such an artist would be fully integrated into the existing art world. He would cause no trouble for anyone who had to cooperate with him, and his work would find large and responsive audiences.*

*Call such artists integrated professionals.’*

*(Becker, 1982, p. 228)*

*‘Every organised art world produces mavericks; artists who have been part of the conventional art world of their time, place, and medium but found it unacceptably constraining. They propose innovations the art world refuses to accept as within the limits of what it ordinarily produces.’*

*(Becker, 1982, p.233)*

According to Becker those individuals whom he describes as ‘integrated professionals’ possess the necessary knowledge, skills, and personal qualities that equip them to practice their profession with ease, both for themselves and for the patrons and audience. However, in situations where the artist refuses to accept the conventions of



the art establishment they operate within, they may deliberately choose to practice outside that establishment's frame of reference. Becker describes such artists as 'mavericks' since they are artists who doggedly practice their craft in spite of rejection and/or a lack of appreciation from others in their particular visual arts establishment. Becker believes that 'mavericks' are artists who have potential to devise both entirely new concepts for their artworks and innovative methods of production because they are seeking alternative modes with which to express their creativity, in comparison with artists who practice in conventional ways. Perhaps this might sound as if only innovative methods and experimental creators can achieve progress by breaking the conventional modes of operation. In Becker's (1963) *Outsiders* he shows how labelling is used to classify people who are considered deviant by society. Consequently, people who have thus been 'labelled' begin to act according to their classification. Similarly, the artist who starts to act in a way that is deviant provokes society to identify this behaviour and 'label' it. As a result, it becomes important for artists to become socially deviant as a necessary component in the process of developing their artistic brand, style, and name. The public, in view of this, then recognises 'deviant' artists by name; in Becker's case he calls them 'mavericks'.

However, it is important to point out that according to Becker these 'mavericks' have abandoned their mode of operation within the conventional art world in order to establish their practice independently, outside the establishment. This therefore means that they are fully aware of how the conventional art world operates before they make the decision to work outside its confines. Bearing this in mind, I will now discuss the perspectives of early career artists who choose nowadays either to practice within a conventional framework, or else to become a 'maverick'.

In my experience as a practicing artist, many early career artists appear to shift from Becker's 'continuity of working', that is, to veer away from working within the

conventional art market. However, according to those artists I interviewed for my research most of them (90%) did not possess adequate knowledge of how the established art market operated in the country where they lived and worked. Many of them expressed a wish to learn more about how their art market operated in spite of their initial prejudices against it. For example, in her interview Zeyno Dagli responded:

Nina11: How does the art market here or elsewhere operate?

Zeyno: I don't know (laughs). I don't know, really.

Nina11: What information would you like to obtain about the art market or general practice, in your art?

Zeyno: I would like to know how...it all happens! (laughs) How anything becomes so famous, or admirable, so inspiring. You know – who makes it happen? Or what makes it happen? If the market is responsible for that? I don't know.

I don't necessarily think the market is...is the main... (how to put it?)....

The market doesn't for me have the main role, you know. If market is selling something to me, and trying to say to me, you should look at this – this is great! That straightaway affects me – and I don't usually, you know, I try to avoid....but of course I would see, out of curiosity....but I might try to avoid. Its like, you know, not reading coffee table books, or something like that.

(Interview Codebook [I][ZD14][34][F][Mix][Res][Tur/UK])

In her response, Zeyno's rejection of the conventional art market can be identified and this rejection becomes emphasised in the discussion that follows, about her not wanting to sell her works, coupled with her curiosity toward how the market functions. Many artists I interviewed came up with similar contradictions. For example, artist Beverly Pepper expressed it clearly in her interview:

'Oh, I can't stand the thought of markets. It's markets that have destroyed, really, the quality of art. Somebody will ask me, I would like to know how to make a better promotion for my artwork to be more widely spread... You see, we all want that. We all want to be famous. We all want our art to be seen by everybody. I thought you were asking me something more profound.'

(Interview Codebook [I][BP1][85][F][Scu][Pro][US/Ita])

Thus it seems that many artists may reject the conventional art market simply because of their lack of understanding as to how it actually works. Often when artists felt unable to access or participate in the conventional art market they chose to reject it before they had equipped themselves with even a basic understanding of how and why it functions. They seem therefore predisposed to attempt to join the 'mavericks' self-employed market, but in an unprofessional way since they lack the experience that Becker's 'mavericks' are presumed to possess (that knowledge about, or the practical experience of working within the art establishment). I would describe these artists as 'unprofessional mavericks'. They differ from the Becker's (professional) 'mavericks' in that they lack the skills and savoir faire necessary to be able to operate within the art establishment, so therefore it will follow that they will also lack those collaborative skills necessary to independently bring their own projects to fruition. One also needs to

point out that the ‘unprofessional mavericks’ require additional subsidy to conduct their unconventional practice since by nature their kind of practice is often experimental in nature, rather than having commercial appeal.

While developing the second case study *Eye Dreams* (2004) I investigated how an artist can attempt to break into the conventional art market. In the case study analysis I discussed the conditions required by artists and the possibilities available to them for making a sustained attempt to enter the conventional art world. I also explored how an artist can pursue an alternative path toward self-management, and to what I would describe as ‘unprofessional maverickism’. This investigation included an examination of both the artist’s functional responsibilities together with aspects of their performance when collaborating on an art project, similar to those attempts by newly graduated artists who exhibit for self-promotion.

Zeyno Dagli, a Ph.D. student (in Arts and Communication, University of Brighton) who had never exhibited her artwork before, was selected to create and perform a solo exhibition with two supporting artists (DVD film, Case study 2). At that time she did not describe herself as an artist because of her belief that ‘there’s an assumption within the society that artists are unique or creative all the time’. In other words, she believes that by naming oneself as an ‘artist’, one is trying to assert oneself as unique or as an exceptional individual (Interview Codebook [I][ZD14][34][F][Mix][Res][UK/Tur]).

Firstly, as was explained previously, the conventional art market requires that the artist fulfill a basic condition – to be able to stand in a queue for potential selection by key figures that hold power in the conventional art world. As has been discussed, before they can achieve their first exhibition artists are expected to have made a considerable financial investment in their education (even if they are self-taught) and to make additional financial investment in order produce a substantial amount of artwork

prior to making any sale or profit. During this time they require the continued backing and support of family to motivate them sufficiently in order cope in the highly competitive art world, and in addition to mastering their craft they must make themselves available to start their work on their projects/ collaborations in accordance with a gallery organiser's schedule and deadlines, etc.

Zeyno Dagli's original intention for her first exhibition was to show her paintings and drawings.

Image not available due to copyright restrictions

CD, Additional Material, Case study 2. Eye Dreams (2004). Exhibition Brochure, p6.

But after buying her first video camera she decided to combine them with her experimental films. And myself, I took a role of the curator, director and manager of the exhibition. This was not a problem for me, as I already had experience of curating and producing video art festivals in London and Taiwan (CD, Additional materials, Case study 2, Nina11 CV). However, had I been an art dealer or had I needed, at the very least, to cover my expenses, then her decision, as the exhibiting artist, to change the medium of the work she wished to exhibit would not have made collaboration viable. I had learned from previous experience that it is almost impossible for

contemporary artists to support themselves from the sale of short, experimental, art films. Therefore, this exhibition only had the potential to enhance the artist's CV, and to assist her to gain professional experience in the production, management and distribution of her artworks. The curator of such self-managed independent video exhibitions may benefit from the exercise of practicing a site-specific concept and from managing it, and this also may provide a useful addition to a CV. However, I knew in advance that Zeyno did not plan to sell any of her works and she never tried to disguise this fact. On the contrary, in her interview she states:

Nina: Why for example you don't want to concentrate on selling your artworks?

Zeyno: First of all, I don't like the industry. I don't like to commercialise what I do, or I don't want to do something for a company, or for within a brief. I cannot work like that....I know myself, that's why.

Nina: Why is it so? Is it going to kill your creativity, or why is it so?

Zeyno: I don't know, maybe deep down, yes. You're right. I mean, maybe deep down I have this assumption based on, I don't know what – but – its like when it becomes an obligation, when it becomes a duty, it loses its meaning for me. So, that's why.

(Interview Codebook [I][ZD14][34][F][Mix][Res][Tur/UK])

From my point of view, as the exhibition organizer, the fact that the artist expressed such antagonism towards the art market made it clear to me that she did not

care about making any financial gain from the exhibition and that the exposure of her works was her primary goal. However, she appeared to be unaware if she did not intend her exhibition to yield any financial profit (which is after all, an essential factor in any professional undertaking) there would not be any incentive for myself or any other party to collaborate with her in the future, to create a similar exhibition. This was the first problematic situation I encountered in our collaborative practice: if the artist is unable to negotiate a mutually beneficial agreement with a collaborator, which is an essential part of artist's work, there will be no reason for another party to invest in that collaboration. Therefore, even if an artist does not intend to sell their work the artist nevertheless needs to be able to identify all the potential benefits in order to entice and secure collaborators. During her interview Zeyno explained:

Zeyno: I don't price my artwork.

Nina11: So somebody does it...or somebody comes to you and says I would like to buy for a certain price....

Zeyno: It never happens. I don't know....

Nina11: I remember that a friend of yours was interested about getting the prices for one of your works.

Zeyno: They didn't deal with me (laughs)...I should have sent them to you.

Nina11: OK....somebody else needs to do it for you...

(Interview Codebook [I][ZD14][34][F][Mix][Res][Tur/UK])

Zeyno's impression that someone else will negotiate the prices of her work on her behalf is understandable, especially as dealers or a gallery usually represents a professional artist. Nevertheless, before delegating the responsibilities of negotiating the price of the work, the artists should have acquired the skills to do it themselves. All

the parties who enter into collaboration should regard it as a matter of mutual interest to maximize any potential for the benefit of all concerned, rather than simply seeing it from a single point of view (their own). On the day of the *Eye Dreams* (2004) exhibition's opening the art dealer Matthew Bown (Bown, 2006-2010) asked me a question: 'Why did you do this exhibition? I do not see how you can benefit from doing it?' Indeed, I spent at least GBP 2500 and the artist spent the same amount, in addition to which each of us personally invested four months of unpaid work (similar to the expenditure in the previously discussed case studies). All this did not include help from friends and family who freely donated their time and resources. If this exhibition had been mounted in a public or commercial art gallery the artist could not avoid the task of pricing their work because the exhibition managers in these organisations would need to insure all of the exhibits (and for legal reasons the insurance company would request the prices in writing).

The next convention, to which an artist working within the contemporary art market must conform to, is to know how to write about (or else to be able to commission someone else to write about) the works to be exhibited. The artist will be required to provide written background information (concept of their exhibition or art works and personal information) in a format that can easily be published. In Zeyno's case, she already had considerable writing skill and thus was able to provide the appropriate written material about her works with ease, but the remainder of the information in the exhibition brochure comprised of other people's writings. So, it is usually the case that extra material needs to be resourced for inclusion in the artist's catalogue – especially if the exhibition is displayed in a conventional setting. Zeyno found friends in Turkey who agreed to print the exhibition invitations and brochure without charge. However if sufficient time is not set aside for editing and proofing these items before they are published, mistakes will inevitably be made and vital



information may be omitted, such as the names of those who helped to finance the exhibition, etc., and this will cause unnecessary offence to those concerned, or simply look unprofessional. I was confronted by this particular problem while I was taking part in Central Saint Martins College of Art curatorial course and I published a leaflet for a partnership of curators who had devised a small exhibition, *New Altar* (2000), exhibited in the windows of the college, on Charing Cross Road, London. Because I had been unwell at the time, and therefore was behind schedule, I overlooked some typographical errors before this leaflet went to press, and I was unable to correct or reprint the leaflet. The production of the written material required consultation with all the members of the curatorial group, and I should have allowed sufficient time to do this so as to be able to correct mistakes and thus avoid causing offence to the project's sponsors, or to future potential collaborators.

From the start, Zeyno stated that she had no talent for public speaking (at the exhibition's opening) and that she had few PR skills. However, within the conventional art market an artist is often expected to make a speech at their exhibition's opening and to publicly thank all the collaborators and sponsors. In my attempts to find sponsorship for this exhibition I was able to recruit a friend who used his skills in business research. He approached more than 11 potential sponsors:

1. Durkan Pudelek Contact person: Colin Simons. email sent 16/03/04
2. Akbank Contact person: Burak Sezerkan email sent 19/03/04
3. Isbank Contact person: Mr. Lanyel email sent 19/03/04
4. Sofra restaurants Contact person: Huseyin Ozer fax sent: 22/03/04
5. Efes Contact person: Efes restaurant email sent 19/03/04
6. Tupras Contact person: N/A email sent 17/03/04
7. Poas Contact person: Mr. Onelgin email sent 17/03/04

8. Turkish Airlines                      Contact person: Mr. Battal    fax sent: 08/04/04
9. Beco (Plc) LTD. Contact person: Melvyn Goodship email sent 19/03/04
10. Turkish Embassy                      Contact person: Cem Ulusoy email sent 08/04/04
11. Vitrs                                      Contact person: Lucy Lavers email sent 14/03/04

or companies with connections in Turkey (since both Zeyno and the other two artists supporting the exhibition were all Turkish nationals). In the end I managed to secure one sponsor, *Sofra*, a chain of Turkish restaurants based in London and though they were unable to provide financial support, the owner Mr. Huseyin Ozer (<http://www.huseyinozer.com/>) agreed to provide the catering for the exhibition opening (including food, waitresses and a site manager). And regarding the pricing for the artworks: most artists nowadays are expected to have acquired, at the very least, some basic skills in Public Relations, rather than just entertaining the hope that someone else will deal with these issues.

We rented a gallery on London's South Bank from 17-30 May 2004.



**LOPEX ENGINEERING (UK)  
LIMITED**

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Tel/fax 020 7407 5388

Nina Dimitriadi  
Studio J  
Trinity Buoy Wharf  
64 Orchard Place  
London E14 0JW

6 November 2003

**INVOICE**

<b>Re: Rent of the Menier Gallery</b>	
<b>17 May- 30 May 04</b>	<b>£1800</b>
<b>Deposit is to be paid now</b>	<b>£200</b>

The opening was scheduled for May 19<sup>th</sup>, which meant that we only had two clear days to install the exhibition in the gallery before the opening. Based on previous experience in my practice, I considered that for only two people – myself and Zeyno – the timing was extremely tight. Because of this I hired a professional installer to help us with the onsite installation, to set up the large size projection screens and to hang the curtains that Zeyno managed to bring from Turkey in order to block out light from the street, which were necessary since we required very low light levels for the film projection. Zeyno was opposed to the idea of recruiting a professional installer, but it was only during the process of installation that she understood how useful he was, because eventually all three of us ended up working through the night to complete the installation in time. It is therefore important for the early career artist to be open to suggestions of outside help, in order meet deadlines or to cope with emergency situations. Zeyno also rejected my proposal that we hire a professional photographer and video operator to document the opening event. As I knew that both of us would be exhausted by the time the opening took place, even if we were able to cover the event ourselves, it would have required too much effort from us both, to be able to concentrate on these tasks. Many inexperienced artists who are exhibiting their work for the first time just assume that they can save money, and can just multi-task, and are convinced that they can perform the tasks more effectively than others. Unfortunately, if one hasn't already had experience of working under the stress of a 'nonstandard version of the activity' (Becker, 1982, p. 227) it all appears to be much easier (beforehand) than the actual reality of it. In the past I asked two colleagues to photograph some events I organized as a favour, and for free, but because they had technical problems with their cameras and the film, I was left without documentation of these events. Therefore, in instances when the documentation of an event is crucial for

the artist, he/she should provide technical back up, or else pursue the best option, which is to seek financial support to hire outside professionals.

To conclude, an artist with little practical experience or prior knowledge acquired from an art education may impose inappropriate demands on collaborators that will cause unnecessary stress all round. This is exactly why conventional art organisations demand rigorous conditions of practice from participating artists, and also why they tend to seek out individual artists who already have experience and thus are easier to collaborate with.

Finally, with the ever-increasing pressure of competition in the art world today it is very difficult for artists to gain access to the kind of practice where they can accumulate the necessary experience and knowledge similar to the examples mentioned above. The artist is required to invest a considerable amount of time and money, and without doing this they will not be able to achieve the necessary insights and understanding of how the art establishment operates. Logic dictates that if an artist cannot operate effectively to meet the demands of the art establishment then it will also be difficult for the artist to pursue an independent path, since this also requires similar skills, and often if an inexperienced artist chooses to defy conventions and operate outside of them, they may well face financial difficulties. The visual arts education curriculum must therefore make this relevant practical information mandatory for all art students. Inexperienced artists dismiss this kind of knowledge simply because they have not yet been confronted by these practical demands and difficulties, nor have they had the opportunities to find out for themselves how their *idea* of work, of collaborating, and participating in an exhibition can be very different from the reality. My practice has shown me that without knowledge of primary arts management/ administration/ curating, and critical writing skills, young, emerging artists will, as a result of multiple rejections and their distorted perceptions, develop resentment and low

self-esteem. However, if they have alternative means of financial support (other than from their art) they can continue to operate in whatever mode they choose until society decides to accept this ‘new mode of operation, label or tendency, style, fashion, brand, etc.’

## V. Moral and ethical concerns confronting the artist

In Chapter 2 I gave details of my personal motives for creating my documentary photographic project *Return to Beslan* (2005-7) and about its transformation into a case study for this research. I described the various stages I went through while working on this case study and I identified some moral and ethical aspects that may be involved when an artist chooses to incorporate into their work sensationalist or controversial elements derived from disaster or tragedy in the lives of others. The concerns that I wish to focus on in this type of practice relate to a) how the art institution can encourage artists to produce sensationalist artworks, and b) how the public reacts to and even helps to amplify the effect of this kind of sensationalism, and c) my growing conviction, based upon my experience, of the necessity for both art institutions and the individual visual artist to observe and abide by an established moral and ethical code of conduct similar to those professional codes adhered to by doctors, natural scientists and social scientists, in order to prevent the exploitation of vulnerable people by the art market, which may in turn inflict additional, unnecessary trauma on the subjects concerned. The list of recent contemporary artwork based on sensationalist material or subjects is now extensive and ever expanding, and includes artists that are famous, and those who are unknown to art market. The use of a theme or subject that shocks is an

effective method of attracting the public's attention, even if the artist is also heavily criticised for doing so.

A good example is the portrait painted by Stella Vine of Rachel Whitear, a young woman who died of a heroin overdose. Initially, Whitear's parents released Rachel's photographs to the media in a hope of discouraging other teenagers as part of a campaign warning other young people and their parents about the dangers of taking illegal drugs (The Independent, 2002). Rachel's parents could not have expected that their courageous gesture would be rewarded with the kind of portrait that the artist created. Nevertheless, the Museum of Modern Art at Oxford subsequently invited the artist to put on a solo exhibition. In addition, one might think that sadistic photographs taken of prisoners in Abu-Ghraib, may be unlikely material to inspire an artist, but nevertheless they did inspire the Colombian artist Francisco Botero (Marlborough Gallery, 2010) who is represented by the Marlborough Gallery, one of the most prestigious private galleries in the world, to create a series of painting and drawings. Botero's work, in addition to being exhibited at the gallery, was also exhibited in 2007 at the University of California, Berkeley (Berkeley, 2007) at the Library of the Centre of Latin American Studies, even though many American and international public galleries had, in protest, previously refused to exhibit these works. Despite Botero's justification, in which he cited the pre-existing violations of human rights by the American forces in Iraq, he based his drawings and painting on photographs that had been obtained illegally (the prisoners rights were not considered when the photographs were originally released to the media). Furthermore, these images were then transformed into a work of art in which Botero's style of painting caricatured the naked bodies of the prisoners and so further distorted the image of these already abused subjects. Moreover, the photographs by Russian artist Boris Mikhailov of homeless or 'down-and out' alcoholics also appear to be morally dubious. The people who appear

in his photographs seem to acknowledge the presence of the photographer (by looking into the camera) and it is possible that they were paid a fee in return for giving the artist the right to publicly exhibit and expose their way of life. However, despite the ‘documentary’ nature of this work, it is acceptable for a public gallery such as Tate Modern to exhibit these kinds of portraits alongside other artworks with a suggestion that these photographs are an artwork too. Even more extreme are the ‘artworks’ by Santiago Sierra exhibited in the publicly subsidised Icon Art Gallery in Birmingham in which a group of men are shown performing a sex act (BBC News, 2002). These works showed the British public an example of the need for the introduction of a moral and ethical code not only for artists but also for the art institutions displaying the work.

An earlier career artist, on another hand, must constantly deal with financial instability, in addition to those random methods chosen by both private and public art institutions to legitimize and give accreditation to both the artworks and the artists themselves. Moreover, artists have to grapple with a lack of necessary managerial/administrative/communication skills that ideally should be, but are not, made easily available to them in the early stages of their career. This, together with their generally inadequate understanding of how the professional art establishment and art markets function, and within which they as artists must operate highlight the problematic conditions that beleague the artist who simply chooses to pursue their artistic vocation while remaining unaware of these abiding professional constraints.

Thus, in the face of ever increasing competition less experienced artists make irrational decisions in favour of producing artwork based on fashionable or sensationalist themes in the hope of attracting the art market’s movers and shakers. While analysing the practice of the case study *Return to Beslan* (2005-7) it became clear to me that an artist whose work deals with issues that are morally and ethically sensitive has the opportunity either to take a position of responsibility towards the

victim/s (subject) and their relatives, or else can choose to abuse or exploit the subject for their own benefit. I became aware while conducting the fieldwork for *Return to Beslan* (2005-7) that an artist must scrupulously make the necessary preparation (such as gathering information from the subjects, and consulting with other people who conducted similar field work and so on), and that all this must be executed with respect to the subjects concerned. In such situations any unprofessional practice can have a negative effect on people who have already suffered abuse and who are therefore in a sensitive state. It then became clear to me while working on this case study that there is no professional guidance available for the independent artist or for creative media workers who are involved in pioneering work on controversial subject matter of this kind. I even enrolled myself to the classes at the ICP in New York (Institute Center of Photography, 2010) to find out what type of moral and ethical code the institute is teaching for taking, for example, street photography: it was absolutely none. At the same time it became apparent to me that this type of situation is fraught with potential for either the accidental or deliberate exploitation of the subject matter, in the service of producing sensationalist artwork.

Taking into account the conditions facing artists that I described earlier, including the need for intense competitiveness from the artist in order to be able to achieve a 'breakthrough' that according Bowness (1989, p.50) requires an 'enormous effort to lift himself (the artist) above his contemporaries', it can now be said that recent events taking place in the global economy have made this an even more aggressive and ruthless process than before. In order to maintain even a basic level of self-employment, the artist needs to battle with intense competition from the ever increasing number of artists who populate the current 'merciless' art economy (Abbing, 2002, p.284) and so will be tempted to employ sensationalist themes in their art to be noticed by the market. Some artists pursue such themes because they are perceived to be



fashionable, others focus on controversial subjects in order to provoke their audience (Stallabrass, 1999, p.129). Now, artists are far more hungry for the world's attention than they were back in 1975 when the writer Tom Wolfe wrote about artists' habit of attention-seeking: 'Have they noticed me yet? Have they noticed the new style (me and my friends are working in)?' (Wolfe, 1975, p.13). Today an alarming change has taken place, when the artist's cry for attention could be interpreted as something like: 'Look, look here! Look what I have done! Now you see what I can do! And I don't care what you think I did wrong! This is what I give to you!' This 'diversification of art in terms of form, content and presentation as an effect of artists' need to meet various agendas and criteria to compete for funding' (Sifakakis, 2002, p.265) directly influences artists' performance and the moral norms attributed to artists historically.

Certain themes promoted by the governmental art agencies relating to social concepts often motivate artists to produce work based on such themes. The institution's process of funding, subsidizing, and exhibiting artists work based on these themes assists artists to establish a national cultural identity (Abbing, 2002 p.249; Stallabrass, 1999, pp.237-269). Private dealers may also be influenced by certain trends and they in turn influence the artist and art production in order to promote their personal or political views. The hugely successful British advertising executive Charles Saatchi and his first wife Doris exerted great influence on many public and private exhibitions, not only in UK, but internationally. They promoted many early or mid-career artists and united them under the banner of 'cutting edge' concepts that favoured shock-based or sensationalist themes as the focal point of their collections, and it was a mark of prestige for an artist to be included in a Saatchi exhibition or collection (Bowness, 1989, p.37). Charles Saatchi maintained a close association with the art school at Goldsmiths College, London (Thornton, 2008, p.128) and I remember attending the BA graduation show at Goldsmiths in 1999 when the students told me

how Saatchi had the habit of dropping in to view graduate art shows without warning, and how he would then purchase their work in bulk paying a minimum price (Stallabrass, 1999, pp.204-205). Such stories would raise the students' hopes, would benefit the profile of the event, and attract a certain level of 'buzz'. In 2002 when I was preparing to stage the *Random-ize Film Festival* (2002) in London, I heard a similar story, but on this occasion Madonna was the celebrity who was expected to make an impromptu visit. We artists love these 'Cinderella type' fairytales in which a rich or famous someone drops in on your show unexpectedly, sees your work, buys lots of it, and thereby saves you from scrabbling around for the rest of your life in pursuit of your earthly needs, thus enabling you to concentrate primarily on the fruits of your unique artistic vision! The artist Craig Fisher (Interview Codebook [I][CF10][55][M][Pnt][Pro][US]) in his interview answered my question about what information he would like to obtain about the art market or general practice in his art in the following way:

'I'd like to know the people that are interested in my work...that *could* be interested in my work...like people that...well...like in the past I've been in openings in Germany and other places, and people have come up to me and said "You know, my husband's going to buy this painting, it's a really great painting...'

(Interview Codebook [I][CF10][55][M][Pnt][Pro][US])

Saatchi's reputation for the 'bulk-purchase of work, and the secrecy of his business practice' (Stallabrass, 1999:204-5) had the effect of manipulating the market in order to establish and maintain high prices for the work in his collection (Thornton, 2008, p.97). Therefore many artists like myself who have not yet achieved that

‘breakthrough’ would very much like to work with these dealers because they promote artists while at the same time proactively influence the prices of their work or in some cases just by the association with Saatchi’s collection significantly influence the reputation of the artist. Thereby many art students in UK are tempted to deliberately develop concept-based work similar in style to artwork previously selected by such dealers or collectors. Spyros Sifakakis (2002, p.265) also described how ‘artists become increasingly competitive and responsible in the process of their work’s promotion and acknowledgement, and their practice becomes increasingly dependent on the agenda of sponsors and funding bodies’.

To summarise, I strongly believe that the general tendencies present in the conceptual background of artwork available in the contemporary art market were very influential on the upcoming generation of artists such as myself. The desire to be noticed by dealers can drive an artist to conform to fashionable trends, and in order to attract the patronage of institutions artists may often incorporate prevailing concepts and themes into their work. Given the current trends and fashion in art, one strategy for achieving this is for artists to present a sensational theme in their artwork, often shocking, outrageous, offensive or morally dubious in nature.

For my own work, I considered many different themes to do with my personal relationships, my past experience in USSR (and its collapse), suicide attempts, my own body, and so forth. While at first sight it appeared as if there was a wide variety of themes to choose from, I was surprised when I reached the conclusion that the themes available to artists are in fact quite limited, especially when one considers that most major themes have already been explored by other artists.

A common theme often fascinating to contemporary artists is that of death, along with aspects of morbidity and mortality. From the point of view of a female artist born in the USSR who has developed a fairly cynical ‘take’ on the forces dominating society

and its functions and on the state of humanity in general, for me it seemed quite natural to choose to work with themes of human failure, suffering, and death. Was I always fascinated and personally involved with these morbid themes and concepts? The answer is definitely yes, but not in the form of artwork. My relocation to UK allowed me to incorporate these themes and ideas into my work because these are subjects commonly employed in contemporary western art. However, according to Stallabrass, many UK artists' concepts and styles were functioning as their 'brand', so bringing with it the risk of becoming 'stuck' within this 'brand' (Stallabrass, 1999, p.286-308), simply because to change the 'brand' might then have a negative effect on the artist's sales as it in the case with any other product.

I have used a number of tragic themes in the artworks that I have incorporated into this research. Quite apart from the case study *Return to Beslan* (2005-7), *The Flight* (2003), a large-scale installation, was based on the air crash in 2002



Case study 1, *The Flight* (2003). Nina Dimitriadi 11's Large scale installation.



Case study 1, *The Flight* (2003). Nina Dimitriadi 11's Large scale installation.

(Wikipedia, 2002.) that took many children's lives away as a result of professional failures by the air-traffic control agency. The small-scale installation *Hope for the Better Consequences* (2003) was dedicated to my friend whose alcoholism resulted in her mental and physical degradation.



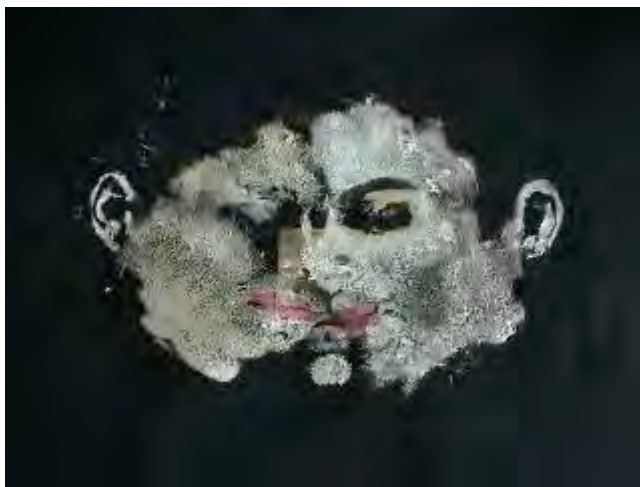
Case study 3, *Hope for the Better Consequences* (2003). Nina Dimitriadi 11's small scale installation.

The *Gas Mask* (2003), in which I used a plasticised gas mask I wore on a flight to Taiwan, captured the idea of 'dangerous air' that existed during the SARS epidemic at that time.



Case study 3, *Gas Mask* (2003). Nina Dimitriadi 11's small scale installation.

I was able to develop, produce, and publicly display these works because of the art market's apparent enthusiasm for these themes, while I would have faced considerable difficulties had I wished to exhibit this work several years previously in the USSR because the concepts of these works would have been alien to both the government and art institutions. On the other hand, my personal ethical code made me view the Western European contemporary art market with hostility, even though it was the same art market that originally encouraged me to incorporate these themes into my work. I had no intention of selling these works because they are based on the suffering of other people, and to receive money for work based on the pain of others is, to my mind, an offence against humanity. Subsequently I began to develop art products that I could sell. Case study 5, *Self-Portrait* (2003-8), was my 'antidote' to my earlier work concerned with morality and ethics. I felt that I would not negatively affect the subject involved by selling these commercially oriented portraits; I do not sell any of the works related to the pain of other people because I believe it is exploitative.



Case study 5, Self-portrait, *Two Art Historians* (2007). Nina Dimitriadi 11's,  
20x 20 inch, Oil on canvas.



Case study 5, Self-Portrait *Larry Kramer* (2008). Nina Dimitriadi 11's, 20x 20 inch, Oil on canvas.

Shortly after I arrived in London in 1999 I saw the photograph of the artist Damian Hirst posing with the head of a human corpse that was exhibited in the Saatchi Gallery (Stallabrass, 1999, p.141) my first reaction was: How was it allowed to be exhibited? Mortuaries must have regulations about photography of dead bodies and especially the face. However, when I was a child, I was fascinated by my grandmother's photographs from before and during WWII in which she posed with her fellow medical students and doctors next to dead bodies in an anatomy theatre.



CD, Case study 3, *Exhausted Body* catalogue, page 1

These were my favourite photographs in my grandmother's collection, but the difference was that they were doctors and medical students who were posing next to the bodies they worked with for teaching purposes, and no one was smiling in these photographs, in comparison with the Damian Hirst photograph.

In 2008 Pawel Wojtasik, an artist working in US, whose father was a surgeon, exhibited his video work of an autopsy (Martos Gallery, 2008) he filmed in a New York City hospital. He told me he was not allowed to disclose its location, or to identify its name. He approached the hospital via an artist friend who had previously worked there on an art project. Pawel had contacted five hospitals and this was the only one that gave him permission to conduct the project. One doctor based in a South African hospital was outraged by Pawel's request. Pawel informed me that when he filmed the autopsy he had not gained permission from the deceased's relatives or the dead person before their death. Furthermore, he was not permitted to video a tattoo on the corpse or its face so it would be impossible to identify whose body it was (Wojtasik, P., 2009 [telephone interview] with N., Dimitriadi on 17 February 2009, 12:30pm).

However, he explained that a lot of public reaction towards the exhibition of the video was negative, causing one female visitor to vomit while many others walked out within seconds. I asked Pawel if this negative reaction from the public had affected him in any way. He told me that it is a natural human reaction, because we are not prepared to accept a visual representation of death that forces us to contemplate our own mortality, so he expected this kind of reaction.

I discussed the *Body Worlds* exhibition (displaying the work of Dr. Gunther von Hagen who has developed a technique for displaying human anatomical structure using plasticised corpses (Body Worlds, 2006-2010) with Pawel because it is popular with the public in many countries (I queued for over 30min to see this exhibition, both in London and Taiwan). He told me that he decided not to visit this exhibition after he heard that Dr. Gunter von Hagen, the creator of the exhibition, had used body parts of political prisoners bought from China. When I asked Pawel what he felt while he was actually filming the body for his artwork he replied that he that he felt grateful for the opportunity to achieve this kind of mutuality with a human body, and this experience allowed him to appreciate and understand more clearly the common humanity he shared with it. Finally, I asked him what he thought about the idea of introducing a moral and ethical code to guide the practice of artists and art institutions (similar to the codes imposed on doctors and other public professions) that would protect people from being exploited for the sake of ‘art’. He replied that while he understood my reasons for wishing to have a moral code of some sort, he added that he was afraid that it might restrict artists’ freedom of expression. And then he asked me who would be sufficiently qualified to formulate and establish such a code of for artists’ practice? (ibid).

In my experience this type of reaction to a hypothetical situation in which a moral and ethical code could be imposed on both artists and art institutions is to be expected

from artists who work with controversial subject matter, because it will make them worried about limits on their freedom of expression. During the *War, Representation and Documentary* conference I attended at Sussex University in July 2008, the guest speaker John Conroy, the producer and director of a series of ITV programmes about Afghanistan presented by Ross Kemp, similarly to Pawel, opposed my suggestion of establishing a moral and ethical code for artists in the paper that I presented to the conference on this subject

(<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/history/documents/programme.pdf>). However, at the same conference Dr. Andrea Pogliano, who discussed the exploitative way that documentary photographs taken during the war with Iraq were used by the news media, reached a similar conclusion in line with my proposal. He supported the idea that a moral and ethical code for the artist/photographer or for art institutions and public media agencies should be considered, because there exists widespread evidence of the misuse and exploitation of such images for the benefit of the photographers and media corporations. Yet, I also agree with Pawel Wojtasik's point, that it is often very difficult to draw a line between what is 'moral' and 'immoral' in the field of contemporary art, but nevertheless I think concerted attempts to form a consensus about these distinctions must be considered.

This discussion on 'moral and immoral' issues in an artist's work needs to be researched further and taken into consideration by all of the stakeholders involved. The dilemma of artists' necessity to search for sensationalism for their artwork is in itself not a negative issue. My concern is about the possible exploitation or abuse of other people involved in the creation this work. Receiving commercial benefit from disasters befalling other human beings is not considered to be positive human behaviour, but perhaps in contemporary society it has become acceptable. This should also be considered as a cause for concern together with the increasing lack of professionalism

in the art world where the lack of skills might be considered a positive feature for the creation of artists' own styles and identities, as much as the degradation in financial reward for artists' labour/work, and the elitist institutional influence on artists' operation and decision-making.

The loss of artists' professional skills, the inadequacy of financial reward for artists' work, and the influence on artistic decision-making from art organisations with questionable practices – all of this makes me question what is now actually included in the professional practice of being an artist, and how we see ourselves as professionals and what we do. My personal practical experience, as I have explained, did not leave me with an optimistic view of the possibility of continuing my career as a full-time self-employed visual artist. Thus, I felt it necessary to research other artists' opinions on the same questions. The results are discussed in the next Chapter.

## Chapter 4. Art as a vocation

This Chapter provides a further account of the interview results relating to the artist's decisions to pursue an art career and the meaning they attach to their choice of being an artist. This involves an investigation into three major components: 1) the vocational nature of the artist's decision to become an artist; 2) a facility to create art from an early age; 3) supportive influences on the artist's development, such as family, friends, tutors, and peers - other artists who recognize talent and provide encouragement. Furthermore I will explain the results from the interviews, where artists' responses to the question "Why are you an artist?" demonstrates how they perceive their role, the influence of the artistic community, together with their almost spiritual belief in their chosen profession. I will then present the case that art is difficult to define for any stakeholder and as a result it continues to serve a variety of definitions depending on the stakeholders' preferences. Finally, I discuss the artist's personal resistance to the external conditions they operate within, which affect them psychologically in specific ways. This includes selfish behavior, stubbornness, risk-taking attitudes, etc., which are consistent with my personal view of the artist's operation in the set of conditions discussed in this thesis.

As discussed in the Introduction, the artist's professional path is very often based around a vocational 'calling' derived from personal motives and impulses, similar to those who work in the natural sciences or in religious professions such as priests (Weber, 1948; Erickson, 2002). In the practical part of this research where I examined some of the conditions that resulted in the artist's decision to practice art, I was able to explore in depth how the artist viewed their profession more as a vocation rather than as a rational choice. In order to investigate the vocational nature of the artist's practice I

constructed some questions that arose during the practical case studies, and I examined these further via semi-structured interviews with 22 international MFA students and self-employed visual artists. From these, three major questions emerged: Why do artists continue to pursue a career path that is fraught with adverse conditions? How do they define 'art' (or whatever it is that preoccupies them)? And, finally – How do they think the occupation of an artist differs from other professional occupations?

Sarah Thornton (2008, p.50-51), a British researcher in visual arts, questioned many people during her visit to Los Angeles (including the MFA students at California Institute of the Arts) about what they think an artist is? Because of the hostile responses she received, she concluded that this question violated some taboos. However, in my research, the artists I interviewed, particularly those in early career or mid-career stage, were cooperative and responded to the questions 'Why are you an artist? – and – What does it mean to you, to be an artist?' with no hostility, but instead expressed some surprise and confusion, though the more experienced and mature artists showed some reluctance to answer this question.

As discussed previously, artists follow their profession because of personal inner motivation. Thus, by asking the question, 'Why are you an artist?' artists may feel intimidated or insulted because this question is a personal matter to them. Moreover, they might feel that I am judging their decision to be an artist. In my personal experience I continuously ask myself if I shall remain in this profession, of being an artist, so that when I'm confronted with the same question from another person it evokes a negative internal reaction because it causes my own past doubts to resurface. However, according to the artist Beverly Pepper, who reacted with the most aggravation to this question, the decision to pursue a career is entirely intrinsic and is not a decision one makes:

‘(Slightly agitated) This is a young person asking that question. No, I would like to tell you, this is the last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – artists decide to be artists. When I was young, almost every colleague I had or friend who was in the art world as an artist, didn’t decide – they were.

Just a kind of path of life’

(Interview Codebook [I][BP1][84][F][Scu][Pro][US/Ita])

Beverly Pepper’s response implies that artists do not become artists (a choice of profession), but they *are* artists because it is not up to them to make the decision; they are simply following their destiny, calling, or their path of life.

All of those artists I surveyed, regardless of age, experience or location, explained that their motivation to become an artist, and to maintain their practice as an artist, was due to a need to satisfy personal impulses rather than being motivated by any hope of financial reward. The artists explained that they produce their art because it is a part of their nature, their lifestyle, and their vocation. I will quote just a few of them answering the questions ‘Why are you an artist? – and – ‘What does it mean to you, to be an artist?’:

‘...you find these paths in your life, instinctively’

(Interview Codebook [I][AJ4][37][M][fot][Pro][UK])

‘... it is an alternative way of existing, or having something that exists’

(Interview Codebook [I][AS9][37][F][Fil][Stu][UK])

‘...because I wasn’t happy in anything else I was doing...’

(Interview Codebook [I] [EA3][28][F] [Pnt] [extra] [GR/UK])

‘... I don’t like doing anything else!...’

(Interview Codebook [I][DN8][31][F][Pnt][Stu][UK])

‘ ...from my interior voice I knew that I had to do it’

(Interview Codebook [I][CF10][55][M][Pnt][Pro][US])

‘ ...I just don’t think there’s anything else.... I don’t think it could be otherwise...’

(Interview Codebook [I][PP16] [47][F][Mix][Stu][US/UK])

‘...there is not really another option for me.’

(Interview Codebook [I][MF18][28][M][Pnt][Stu][US])

Moreover, more than half of those interviewed explained that they acquired the ability to draw, paint, or create art works when very young, and often their ability to do this made them stand out from those around them. I myself offered an example of what happens when other people notice that you have exceptional skills, because when I was at secondary school I was selected by my art teacher to represent my school at the regional painting competition, and after winning a first prize there, I was then sent to represent my district in the city competition (Interview Codebook [I][N11][32][F][Mix][Res][NoNatn]). Other artists had similar stories to tell:



‘It was the thing that, you know, from my first sort of memories and that, it was always the thing that I was sort of better than most at doing...’

(Interview Codebook [I][GG13][33][M][Pnt][Extra][UK])

‘...and drawing is something I’ve always done ever since I was a kid’

(Interview Codebook [I][MC21][24][F][Pnt][Stu][US])

‘I was drawing at a very young age – at the age of 5. This is something that you’re good at, and you enjoy, and you love it’

(Interview Codebook [I][LP17][48][F][Pnt][Stu][Cub/US])

When society around you perceives you to be more capable than others at doing something, it always feels rewarding. After conducting a hundred interviews with artists and children the psychologist Shaun A. McNiff (1977) concluded that the predominant motive for artists is that of *Competency/Mastery*. He quoted Jacob Bronowski (1973) who said that the pleasure humans derived from practicing and developing their own skills distinguished humans from animals. ‘He (man/woman) loves to do what he does well and, having done it, he loves to do it better’ (Bronowski, 1973 cited in McNiff, 1977, p.128). In addition, the artists I interviewed explained that they decided to become an artist because art was already an essential part of their life, and because it gave them happiness and a sense of fulfilment. Similarly, McNiff (1977, p.129) identified what he terms the *Aesthetic Pleasure/Intensification of life* motivation in artists, and described them as those who ‘take pleasure in self-satisfying sensory experience’. This is supported to some extent by the artists I interviewed:

‘...that I feel I have to do it to feel satisfied ...’

(Interview Codebook [I][BD19][25][F][Mix][Stu][US])

‘Because it’s the thing that I most enjoy doing’

(Interview Codebook [I][AY7][35][M][Mix][Pro][US])

‘I’ve found that...what makes me happy – is drawing ...’

(Interview Codebook [I][TI22][27][M][Draw][Stu][US])

‘It was the only thing that excited me’

(Interview Codebook [I][RR5][38][F][Pnt][Pro][IR/US])

‘...it gives me great satisfaction and great pleasure, and it gives me a lot of enjoyment. I couldn’t do anything else’

(Interview Codebook [I][EMG2][69][M][Mix][Pro][US])

In order to summarise and reflect upon some major content issues inherent in the vocational nature of the artistic profession, I have, from the artists’ responses, identified four recurring categories:

1) Artists’ define their profession as an emotional response, or as a destiny offering them no other option, rather than as a description of their professional context and responsibilities. Concepts like *Life-path*, *alternative way of existing*, or the *only thing they can do*, etc. are examples of artists’ decisions based on their *Intrinsic* (Erickson, 2009, pp.119-122) inner motivation to follow this career path, rather than *Extrinsic* (ibid) decisions based on rational or logical choices and external conditions.

2) All of the respondents identified that they showed higher artistic abilities than their peers since childhood. This can often be explained by the influences in their childhood environment and parental involvement, which can also intensify their need to visually express themselves, and allow them more opportunity to practice artistic skills. Thus, these artists have natural ability not only to see differently but also to create, which requires skills, techniques or aptitude from a young age.

3) Creating art makes artists feel happy, joyous and content, and in other words provides them with the *feeling of Aesthetic Pleasure/Intensification of life* (McNiff, 1977, p.129), and also gives them a strong incentive to sustain themselves as professional artists, despite the financial restraints (Abbing, 2002).

4) The artists indicated that they had received strong support and encouragement from their families and friends to pursue their artistic path (this was clear in responses to the questionnaire), and as a result of this support they were more likely to remain on this path. Accordingly, many of the artists interviewed became distinctive in their social group, because of their creative abilities, and this, for material and psychological reasons, also encouraged them to pursue their path as an artist.

However, the motives to pursue a career based around something that is already an integral part of one's life, and to seek fulfilment (joy or pleasure) from one's profession are quite different to the qualities that are required to achieve a rational understanding of the artist's professional conditions and the structures of the art market. Even while they were being interviewed, many of the artists were struggling to explain their perceptions of how the art market operates, and my research indicates, quite emphatically, that 19 out of the 22 artists interviewed did not possess even a modicum of understanding or knowledge of how the art market functions. However, artists' most frequent observations of the art market could be loosely categorised as: 1) 'the art market is driven by the taste and requirements of wealthy individuals who are pursuing

their own personal agenda'; 2) that 'the visual arts market does not actually have any definable structure and is chaotic'; 3) 'the art market primarily exists to make money rather than to distribute art work of quality' (Appendices, Interview bar-charts). These replies seem to demonstrate that artists generally have negative perceptions of the art markets within which they are supposed to function as professional artists and for which they are supposed to produce and distribute their art but of which they do not show knowledge about the markets operation, structure, etc. But why is there this gap in knowledge about the art market? And why do these artists reject knowledge about the art market's mechanism of operation?

Many artists continue to operate in the face of negative feedback and tend to reject or ignore it. Moreover, when a group or community of artists reject or alienate themselves from the conventional practice of the art market – becoming 'mavericks', according to Becker (1982), or what I call 'unprofessional mavericks' (Chapter 3/IV) then they become part of a 'brotherhood', according to Henri ([1923] 2007, pp.15-16), or an artistic community with common behaviour, where one practices art not because it pays, but as a method of communication, to unite together to fight for changes to the prevailing set of beliefs; 'The artist is teaching the world the idea of life. The man who believes that money is the thing is cheating himself. The artist teaches that the object of man's life should be to play as a little child plays. Only it is the play of maturity – the play of one's mental faculties' (Henri [1923] 2007, pp.115-116).

However, as previously discussed, it is not only artists who pursue a career that is based on a 'calling' rather than financial reward. Those who researched natural scientists (Erickson, 2002) and religious professionals (Beckford and Gilliat, 1998) have determined through their analysis that these professions are also driven by vocational concerns to pursue their profession as a life path, and similar to artists, what they receive in return is 'job insecurity, lack of institutional recognition and relatively

low pay' (Erickson, 2002, p.22). As previously mentioned despite the fact that all these particular professional paths are populated by individuals not motivated by monetary profit, the external conditions experienced by practicing artists differ from the other professions with similar vocational paths. I have already discussed it in Chapter 1/ III. that even other groups of arts professionals, for example, musicians, dancers, or actors, experience different conditions of practice, so to avoid making misleading generalizations I need to point out that the same research methodology that is applied to other arts professionals cannot usefully be applied to visual artists.

Nevertheless, even though the conditions of practice attached to these professions differ, I have identified some occupational hazards common to them all. Erickson's (2002) research on natural scientists' professional conditions has already highlighted the ways in which vocational professions such as in the natural sciences have been exploited. His research which is based upon 26 semi-structured interviews with two teams, one of physicists, and the other of biochemists, clearly showed that these professionals were an easy target for abuse by the markets they operate within (Erickson, 2002). It is not difficult to imagine that the public in general, as well as the private individuals and institutions who operate within the markets of art and science are aware or have the perception that the primary goal for these professionals is not to receive monetary reward for their work, then the financial reward they receive will not be commensurate with that awarded to other professions. This is simply because professionals who perceive their work as a vocation will continue to deliver their product regardless of the salary or other benefits, or even in spite of the negative conditions they experience in the process. Indeed, all of my artwork was a result of self-subsidy, and the payments I received were inadequate, and resulted in zero or negative profit, as mentioned in Chapter 3/ II.

Despite the art sociologist Janet Wolff's (1983, p.1) argument against the romantic and mystical notion of art as a creation of 'genius' that is 'unaffected by capitalist relations and market constraints' (Wolff, 1983, p.18), she maintains that the notion of 'artistic genius' is losing its credibility because it cannot be endorsed by a society that has elevated artists into such a status. At the same time the idea of the artist's 'genius' is not corroborated by artists themselves who cannot explain why it is they produce art. The artists who nevertheless continues to pursue the old tradition described by Robert Henri ([1923] 2007)– and produce work without being paid, envision themselves as selfless geniuses, - 'selfless' because they will work in spite of generating little or no income, and 'genius' because of their ability to demonstrate exceptional talent and/or skill, which they generally have been practicing since childhood (this has often been seen by many societies as a 'gift' from nature or God).

I do agree, however, with Wolff (1982) and Becker (1982) that art is a social product and my practical case studies confirm how external social conditions can influence not only the decisions the artist makes in the course of producing their art but also influences the conceptual basis of their work. However the analysis of my interviews shows that artists are either unaware or do not fully understand the structure of their professional path, and rather than consciously identifying any influences upon it they pursue it in a more intuitive way. This is similar to Erickson's scientists whose definition of their craft (science, in this case) has little in common with their decision to practice as a scientist (Erickson, 2002, pp.29-52). I am not arguing against the idea that art, like any other craft or product, requires the necessary processes of production and distribution, together with an audience (Becker,1982) and is affected by the society which influences its production, but I wish to assert that artists are similar to scientists in that there is a separation between their own understanding of their craft, and that of marketing and management of their craft work – because the latter does not provide the

reasons why they choose to produce the work in the first place. In such a situation the Artist as a producer, and Art as an artwork, exist as two separate entities and therefore cannot be researched as a single entity, because ‘The error lies in thinking that an understanding of the individual motivation for producing a painting is the same as an understanding of the painting’ (Hadjinicolaou, 1973, p.21). It might be apparent in this study that the content of my artwork for the research case studies is not positioned in any way that is primary to the discussion. This is because my motives to create are separate from the artwork I produced; my decision to create is different from the content of the work itself, which is apparent in the case studies’ visual data, the case studies’ DVD films, and in the written component of this research. As a result of the process of creation and the subsequent transformation of thought into the completed work, I felt the separation of my own thoughts into the final product, which then started to develop a life of its own. As Roland Barthes (1977) said: ‘book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into a before and an after’ (Barthes, 1977, p.145). And while extending from this idea, it then becomes clear that my own *self* becomes irrelevant to the artwork I produce.

Thus, in the next discussion I will examine how artists understand the nature of what they produce – their artwork. Do they separate themselves from their art production or do they see themselves and their work as unified whole? Furthermore, I will attempt to unpick the rationale supporting the separation of the artist’s motivation to create artwork from the artwork itself, and I will also examine the public perception of both.

## I. 'Why are you an artist?'

The concept of personal Identity includes the 'sense of self' or an 'understanding of self' and of how 'we are perceived by the others'. We construct our identity through 'social interactions' that consist of the 'perception others have of us' (Erickson, 2009, p.118) and thus our identity can be constructed by many factors that shift within these perceptions. These factors can include family influence and cultural traditions and the institutions affecting the individual in society as well as work and monetary status (Webb, 2006, pp.18-19), but according to Erickson (2009, p.118) our sense of identity can also be affected by social norms involving gender, age, and nationality (Bradley, 1996, p.25).

But with the interviewed artists, on the contrary, since it appears that many were strongly motivated by their impulse to reject social norms, to pursue their profession as a vocational calling, and in the process would disregard notions of job stability, equitable wages, and the adverse conditions of the art market, and instead would rely more on the values of the artistic community that they operate within. Moreover, they appear to be happy to do so for as long as they can physically endure these exceptional professional conditions (Abbing, 2002, pp.181-182). It is difficult for a sociologist, economist or psychologist to influence an artist's perceptions of social conditions because essentially the artist's point of view of those conditions is personal to them and their artistic community, 'brotherhood' (Henri, [1923] 2007), within which they interact. The artist's predilection for pursuing their practice, as is the case of religious professionals, causes them to be reluctant to alter their chosen lifestyle, which in turn increases their motivation to pursue their practice.

For artists themselves, their determination to live through their creative work has many facets: it is an essential part of their lifestyle, a vocation, the result of intuitive



decisions, a fulfillment of happiness, the best thing they can do, their perception of reality, and their way to communicate (DVD film, Case study 6). Therefore an artist does not perceive their decision to become an artist as being based upon a ‘myth’ or a ‘cultural stereotype’, as explained by Bain (2005). Rather, it simply appears as part of the everyday reality of the artist's life. I agree that artists have a tendency to pursue irrational modes of thinking, as in fairytales or dreams, and they often quote the lives of other artists ‘in previous epochs and to strive after some kind of historical continuity’ (McNiff, 1977, p.133). But artists do not live in a world of fairytales because their practical everyday external experiences are, by their nature, a stark contrast to any romantic ideals or dreams they may have; they have very challenging living and working conditions as demonstrated in the practical component of this research and in the interview data. Moreover when replying to the question I posed to each artist I interviewed – as to whether or not they had a role model for their personal and professional life – half of the interviewed artists claimed that they were inspired and influenced by their friends and relatives, rather than by a famous historical figure (indeed, such figures influence artists or inspire their creativity mainly in cases when the artist is subsidised or supported by other means), and the other half of the 22 did not have any role-model at all and rather saw themselves as ‘trailblazers’. Indeed, though many told me that their work was influenced by such and such an artist, or that they admired many artists who lived in the past, in general the artists demonstrated individualism rather than conformity. As Huw Bartlett, an artist who had recently graduated, explained:

‘I think it’s very dangerous to have role models. The only role model you can...you can...sort of...I’ve never really understood the practice of living

up to someone else...because you only need to live up to yourself, I suppose.... I think everyone's a role model as well, you know,'

(Interview Codebook [I][HB12][25][M][Mix][Stu][UK])

And artist immi, one of the mid-career artists, said:

'I read books or... and someone in these books, they say "Oh I had a teacher at school, he was very important for my development"'. 'I never had a teacher at school who was important in my development ...'

(Interview Codebook [I][IM15][NoAge][NoGen][Pnt][Extra][NoNatn])

It was also noticeable that early career artists seemed to be more likely to comment on the influence of their contemporaries, on how they helped and inspired them, while on the contrary mid-career or established artists, especially those in the UK, tended to assert a rather 'maverick' attitude towards the establishment of their position as an artist. My research can confirm that contemporary artists in general do not appear to be swayed by the various myths about the success of famous artists, but instead they follow their own individual paths even though the practices and achievements of successful and celebrated artists do often serve to inspire and guide them as they grapple with the difficult daily challenges they face in their practice, and even when they fear their success may only be achieved posthumously. The 'immortality motive' described in McNiff's (1977) research is connected with artist's wish to leave behind their 'spiritual presence' for the future generations, and is similar to their communication motives (ibid). In case study 3, I mentioned that '...artists believe that the traces of one's life can be immortalized within a work of art. Ultimately the humanizing power of art can be interpreted by future generations as the life-to-death cycle...' (CD, Additional materials, Case study 3,

Catalogue, p.7; DVD film, Case study 3, 27:30sec), and that without the physical struggle the human being can't feel or understand the sacred beauty of life (CD, Additional materials, Case study 1, Brochure *The Uncertainty of Wind Power* 2002 exhibition, pp.1-2). Indeed, artists are often fascinated with notions of spirituality, death, and faith, and they seek out 'universal truths' that will serve to confirm and prolong situations in which they continue to endure wretched conditions (in a mode of masochism or quasi-religious asceticism) in order to reach that higher state of consciousness believed to be necessary for the practice of their art.

The notion of 'spirituality', as discussed by many of the artists interviewed, has always been an aspect of artists' lives in the past as well as in the present. Robert Henri ([1923] 2007, p.116) in *The Art Spirit* attributed art to the subconscious, 'We do certain things and are influenced by certain things without knowing why'. In the study described by Catherine Casey (1995) managers of a large corporation promoted solidarity, teamwork and a family-like climate in their working culture. This subsequently influenced the employees' dedication to their work, corporation, and its products, in a way that is similar to the way that people in which become dedicated to their religious faith (Casey, 1995, p.191). I personally experienced, and continue to experience, social influences on my personal and professional motives as a result of my education and upbringing in the Soviet Union. The main effect of this influence was that the status of the individual was demoted in favour of the community for the promotion of solidarity. Instead of religious belief it was called socialism, and the society's leaders were treated like religious saints.

In addition, many spiritual movements, including the Theosophical movement, influenced artists towards the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when it attempted to establish a 'universal brotherhood' between people through the study of comparative religion, philosophy, and science without discriminating against

race, creed, sex, caste, or colour. For example, Wassily Kandinsky ([1914] 2006), who adopted both the spiritual Theosophical teaching in Germany and also socialist influences while working in post-revolutionary Russia, showed in his book *Concerning The Spiritual In Art* how he had absorbed spiritual beliefs and had transferred them into his practice and his abstract artwork (Hidden Hands, 1996). His contemporary, Piet Mondrian, another artist who was influenced by Theosophy kept a photograph of Madame Blavatsky, one of the founders of the Theosophical Movement, on his studio table until his death (although toward the end of his life he adapted his Theosophical beliefs to New York city's nightlife 'spirituality', after relocating to USA) (ibid).

Indeed, diverse beliefs in spirituality or the occult have influenced the lifestyles and modes of production of many artists. Robert Henri influenced works of many generations of artists in America when he wrote: 'The picture, if a picture results, is a by-product and may be useful, valuable, interesting, as a sign of what has passed. The object, which is at the back of every true work of art, is *the attainment of a state of being*, a state of high functioning, a more than ordinary moment of existence.' (Henri, [1923] 2007, p.157). For the sociologist, art manager, or art historian this kind of assertion is difficult to grasp as it based on the practical experience of being an artist and producing the artwork, a process that involves both the artist's inner and outer feelings, and which an artist may often find difficult to articulate and verbally express even to him or herself. This then becomes a key component in the separation of the artist from society, namely those intangible or mysterious conditions through which artists produce their work, which they themselves cannot easily render into words, rather than processing ideas as input and output in their brains. This is similar to what Bruno Latour (1999) explained about scientists, a phenomenon he called *blackboxing* whereby information that is input into the scientist's brain produces output (knowledge), and where both input and output can be measured, but the process that

occurs in the brain cannot be understood. This concept is analogous to artists, who often do not understand their creative process. As a result, their output or artwork, when they are not able to define it, is defined by society within its own terms, especially when the output does not have one specific definition as the word 'art'.

Nevertheless, it is my belief that for the artist the sense of spirituality is extinguished when the individual is faced by unbearable conditions for survival. In my experience many artists who speak about spirituality in their work have often been privileged with positive conditions in their practice and personal life (including financial support from elsewhere, or by receiving a healthy income from an additional job). For example, artists like Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), was born into an upper middle class family that allowed him a wide-ranging education, and the opportunities for foreign travel. However, the contemporary British artist Neale Worley, whose education at an art college and later at London's Royal Academy of Arts, was paid for by the British Government between 1978-89 (he was 44 years old at the time of the interview (Appendices, Questionnaire sample[Q 5]; Interview Codebook [I][NW6][44][M][Pnt][Pro][UK]) described how his personal life had always been greatly affected by a low income and inadequate living conditions:

Neale: I have been doing it long enough already (laughs). So since I left college it has been 17 years already, and I am still struggling and still doing it.

Nina: so you are prepared for the next 10 years to do the same?

Neale: Well I have been going on this long, so I am not giving up now.

Nina: Why?

Neale: *I think it is to do with being stubborn.*

Nina: Is it something to do with loving art? What is the real reason for suffering like that? Because I tried it and it is not easy.

Neale: No, not easy at all. But I think, as the years go on, you become more, more stubborn and you think: 'Right, I am going to make it, if I can'. And also, I think, it is when you have given up so much and you suffered so much, in the early years to do it, you think: I have given up this and I have given up that, so something is going to happen. So you keep doing it. And also I possibly could not be employed doing anything else, anyway. Because, I am not qualified in anything else.

(Interview Codebook [I] [NW6][44] [M][Pnt][Pro][UK])

As I see it, it would be society's loss if Worley, after ten years of receiving state funding for his art education that trained him to be an artist, suddenly changed his profession in order to provide himself with a better living and social conditions, which he had sacrificed while being an artist, in order to put an end to his personal suffering.

In the past I also assumed that I would naturally make a rational decision not to pursue the path of becoming an artist if my own personal and financial conditions seemed inappropriate. After completing the first stage of my education I decided I would make a career in business, even though the Russian government had paid for five years of my full-time art education, both before and after the collapse of USSR, but which, nevertheless, could not provide me with a decently paid job, either as an artist or as an art teacher. As a result, I found an alternative well-paid job in the finance business and was able to secure a stable income. As soon as it became possible to continue on the path of being an artist I immediately made every effort to resume an artist's life using the funds I had saved from my work in business. Many other artists have explained a similar tendency:

‘I have tried to stop being an artist but I find it is not so easy ...to stop. I have an idea and the only way I can deal with the idea is to make the artwork’

(Interview Codebook [I][IM15][NoAge][NoGen][Pnt][Extra][NoNatn])

‘After my BA I didn’t carry on with it, didn’t have a lot of confidence or a lot of contacts, but eventually you come back to it, because...it was missing....’

(Interview Codebook [I][AS9][37][F][Fil][Stu][UK])

But what is it exactly that pulls us back to this profession? It seems that the next logical step is to analyse what it is that we do as artists that allows us to become reconciled with the negative conditions that we constantly appear to be faced with, and instead of simply opting to pursue secure employment, we choose to pursue the rocky road of the artist?

II. Can art be defined? Why do artists find it difficult to define what they do?

I concluded Chapter 1 with a discussion of the difficulties inherent in arriving at a serviceable definition of art because of the fact that art is required to fulfill a wide range of functions within contemporary society and the art market itself. Currently it is often the case that either the meaning of one definition of art will radically shift when placed into different contexts, so that there will be little in common between the various

definitions offered, or else a single definition of art will be required to accommodate a wide spectrum of meaning, to the extent that this often leaves visual arts practitioners confused and irritated, especially when their own definitions of their art contradicts how others define their art.

I will now investigate artists' own perspectives on definitions of art, and the various positions they may adopt in relation to other stakeholders' definitions that are applied to visual art. In fact, if every stakeholder clung rigidly to their own definition of what art meant for them, this would result in the artist being robbed of both their sense of integrity and of the mechanisms that define what it is they do as artists, together with their sense of their own artistic product. The artist's professional identity therefore risks being obliterated when their work is forced to serve a wide spectrum of multivalent definitions.

All of the artists I interviewed demonstrated a marked hesitation when trying to find the right words to describe how they identified the meaning of art. During the interviews, when I was asking the relevant questions I often felt that I was encroaching on areas that were very personal to these artists, and that in doing so I often risked causing them offence. While answering the same question myself (Interview Codebook [I][N11][32][F][Mix][Res][NoNatn]) I felt that my own definition sounded far too general and did not answer the question; I offered my own point of view based on a broad discussion about the definition of art, rather than directly answering the question about what *art* means for *me*. Besides that, I also felt the need to rehearse my response in advance in order to be able to quickly find the right words to explain a tangle of complex ideas and feelings that have accumulated in my thoughts and experience while working within the visual arts.

However, the artists I interviewed were able to formulate some definitions for the four major categories of art. First, 80% of all the artists in the group, including those in



early and mid-career as well as the established artists, defined art as being inspiration, belonging to their feelings, a way of seeing, a means of communication, a part of their personal creativity, for example:

‘My definition of art is - a way of looking at something.’

(Interview Codebook [I][HB12][25][M][Mix][Stu][UK])

‘It’s something that comes through inspiration.’

(Interview Codebook [I][RR5][38][F][Pnt][Pro][IR/US])

‘It is just a form of expression.’

(Interview Codebook [I][NW6][44][M][Pnt][Pro][UK])

‘Art is something you develop within yourself.’

(Interview Codebook [I][AJ4][37][M][Fot][Pro][UK])

Secondly, 63% of the same sample that I interviewed also defined art as a product, a production, that involved the making of craft works such as painting, sculpture and so on, that were also derived from inspirations and feelings, and were personal creative acts, for example:

‘Art is a cultural product that serves no other function than...an aesthetic function. It requires certain skills to produce.’

(Interview Codebook [I][AY7][35][M][Mix][Pro][US])

‘Someone said that making Art, was making things that needed to be made.’

(Interview Codebook [I][EMG2][69][M][Mix][Pro][US])

‘*Thought as Image*... I suppose in a pure way, but then image can be sound or painting or sculpture or installation...’

(Interview Codebook [I][AS9][37][F][Fil][Stu][UK])

‘The traditional idea of art includes painting, sort of object-making, like sculpture, but also there are a lot of more definitions now, like, you know, you’ve got video art obviously, you’ve got web art, you’ve got projects that are just conceptual projects – they are art, but they don’t really have a physical.... something sort of physical...to look at...’

(Interview Codebook [I][EA3][28][F][Pnt][Extra][GR/UK])

Third, 36% of the artists interviewed appeared to be aware of how social and cultural factors can influence the ways in which art is defined when they explained that in many contemporary situations, definitions of art tend to be imposed by external forces emanating from art institutions, governmental bodies, the market, or from the general public rather than coming from the artists themselves:

‘...and now we have institutions, we have organisations, and a few things that do that sort of thing (defining art). Whether or not something is “art”, if an institution calls it “art”...that’s not necessarily true, because you can have another person that says what they’ve made is art...no one’s seen it...but I think that “art” is defined as far as you would like to see it be

defined...in...in today's market, for example .... Its perpetuated by a supply and demand always'

(Interview Codebook [I][MC21][24][F][Pnt][Stu][US])

'I think art is defined by the institutions that surround it really'

(Interview Codebook [I][HB12][25][M][Mix][Stu][UK])

Fourth, as many as 31% of those interviewed, of which more than half were established artists, were reluctant to define art. This might be because the more established artists were more cautious about what they said during their video recorded interview, in order to avoid the embarrassment of not being able to arrive at a satisfactory definition of what art is.

Based on my own practice, established artists appear to be more likely to work on diverse public and private commissions, so therefore they need to frequently adjust their definitions to meet their client's necessities. As a result, these established artists might expand their definitions according to their work experience, or else they stop trying to define the work they do to make it is easier to adapt to market demands. As a result, they give vague definitions or avoid the question in general.

However, I felt that all the artists interviewed lacked verbal practice in explaining to the layman their definition of art, or what they understand 'art' to be. This results from two conditions: first, because artists often communicate and interact within their own tight knit communities that share a mutual understanding of what art is and what they – as artists – do; second, because they cannot be sure of what art is, at present, within the vast diversity of meanings that now exist in contemporary society.

Moreover, when I asked artists how they explained their work (or what they do as artists in order to make their art) to other people who do not know them, I found a

hesitation that was similar to that I had observed in the replies to my question about how they defined art. Only four of the 22 artists said it was not difficult for them to explain what it is they do to other people.

The majority claimed that they would rather not attempt to explain their work themselves, and would instead prefer the public to do this. These artists appeared to want the public to decide for themselves what it is they see in their artwork. This indicated that artists are willing to be exhibited outside their own environment and to listen to public opinion on their work – to be evaluated, named or discussed outside their peer group. Thus one could consider that artist's sense of identity can be influenced by criticism of their work, on the one hand, by an audience that appreciates the artist's work or, on the contrary, by an audience that does not. For example, I personally prefer it when people like my work, as do most artists, but in cases when they do not like it, I try to avoid these people and simply ignore their judgments, particularly if they are not based on constructive criticism.

However, the artists I interviewed *were* able to give a more detailed and specific account of the art they make. They usually began by indicating the specific medium they employed, or their category of work (such as painting or sculpture, etc.), and if prompted by the interviewer they would then explain in more detail the concepts behind their work and the process of making it. The entire population interviewed explained that their work was best accessed via visual means. As the artist immi tells us:

‘Well I think the work of art, it must be captivating and when you...for the person when they see it. This is very important. And I think the explanation must always be if you like the secondary moment, but of course the explanation can be part of the work of art, and it can be very interesting, but I...I truly believe that the first experience, when you encounter the work of

art, when you don't know anything about it, when you look at it, or hear it, or smell it, or touch it for the first time – this must be captivating'.

(Interview Codebook [I][IM15][NoAge][NoGen][Pnt][Extra][NoNatn])

This struggle by the artist to define their visual art product, and the field of practice in which they work in professional terms was evident in both of the interview questions discussed above, and was also apparent in the gestures and facial expressions the artists made while delivering their responses to these questions. It therefore became very clear that it is difficult for artists to verbally communicate to those outside their peer group what their art is, and what it is they make – the art product. It appears that visual artists prefer to show what they do rather than to speak about it. In the analysis offered in Sifakakis' (2002) survey, those artists who exhibited in an established contemporary gallery in Britain acknowledged difficulties in identifying what contemporary art is. As one of the artists explained:

'I think it is not up to the artist... because what the work of art means...is context. A work of art doesn't have any meaning without some sort of context and it's the job of the people [another artist Haya nods positively] who put it in the world. Like curators, and galleries, and media, and all these...mediators. They are the people who create context...for the artist's work.'

(Nadav, 31/1/01, cited in Sifakakis, 2002)

Moreover, the same gallery's curator and management personnel explained to Sifakakis that the accreditation of the artist, or their artwork, by the powerful art world specialists also depended on artists themselves in certain ways. The requirement from

artists is to be in “the right place at the right time,” or to know the right people to approach (Sifakakis, 2002, pp.267-270). Therefore, artists who expect the institution to position their work are in return also expected by the institution to be available for them – to assist with the installation of their work, to publicise their work, and to attend opening events, and so on, in order to qualify for accreditation by that institution, as seen in Chapter 3/III.

However, my case studies – *The Flight* (2003), *The Exhausted Body* exhibition (2005) and the *Eye Dreams* exhibition (2004) helped my research by examining how artists are able to create their own context and meaning for their exhibitions by positioning themselves as independent curators/managers of their own creative production. This can especially benefit early career artists who need to exhibit their work in a self-constructed context so as to create a solid foundation for their CV, which in turn will help them to procure more work and commissions within a volatile art market. As has previously been explained by Sifakakis’ (2002) research, it seems that artists rely heavily on institutional accreditation whereby the art institutions construct the meaning of the artworks and thus the meaning of art.

After completing these case studies I participated as an artist in exhibitions sponsored by institutions that consistently required me to submit my CV (CD, Additional materials, Case studies 2, Nina11 CV) listing the exhibitions I had participated in previously. Because I managed to construct and control my own exhibitions as curator, I also managed to create my own context for my artwork, which derived from the curatorial concepts I applied within the exhibitions and which were deliberately structured around my vision of how I want my works to be exhibited and viewed. For early career artists, the independent construction of context requires a basic knowledge of curating and managerial skills together with strong financial backing and a significant investment of time. In return, all this can provide artists with

is a mechanism with which to define their artwork, and a platform for their future exhibitions.

Although the interviews showed that, regardless of the artists' aptitude for finding concepts and ideas for their artwork, 90% of those interviewed claimed it was a natural process for them to create their work in an instinctive or intuitive way, it nevertheless appeared that in general they lacked an understanding of how important it was to possess curatorial and managerial skills in the contemporary art market, which, as I have just explained, are necessary skills for constructing one's own context for their artwork.

In summary, artists find it very difficult to define their field of work. It is not easy for them to explain what they do as artists because: a) they find it hard to articulate verbally the impact their work has on others; b) they seem to prefer to exhibit what they make (their artwork/art) rather than explain its context or conceptual background; c) they are aware that institutional influences on the visual arts exist, and they are resigned to a situation in which accreditation from a specialized art world will define their art/artwork according to institutional preferences. As a result artists are, to a great extent, positioned within the art world by the various art institutions and are thus deprived of their own 'voice'. However, it appears that this situation partly comes about because of the artists' insufficient knowledge about the value of additional skills (curatorial/conceptual and managerial) required from them by the contemporary art market, either because of a lack of available training in the educational institutions and also because the artists themselves often lack the time and money to furnish themselves with these skills. Furthermore, even if the artist already possesses this knowledge they will still need to draw on a significant amount of personal effort, resources and commitment in order to apply it in their practice in today's highly competitive art market. As a result, the majority of artists are unable to find viable definitions for both

their products and their professional identity and so are forced to rely on others to supply this on their behalf.

### III. The inner resources artists draw on to combat adverse external conditions

I have already discussed a dilemma that confronts the majority of artists, namely that their own definitions of 'art' cannot be easily reconciled with the reality of the external conditions they must operate within. Most of the artists I interviewed perceived themselves to be pursuing a vocation. For example, the artist Breanne Duffy, similar to most of the artists interviewed, who had recently graduated with an MFA, explained that her skills and her desire to practice drawing and painting had 'developed organically' since her childhood. In my research sample 63% had become artists largely because of parental influence and support, as 68% of them came from families with an artistic background. Artists who have strong self-belief, or 'stubbornness', as the artist Neale Worley termed it (Interview Codebook [NW6][44][M][Pnt][Pro][UK]), are able to pursue their work without needing a clearly defined professional ladder, and those artists who may also lack any understanding of the visual art market (84% of my sample), could be described as extreme 'risk takers', because of their stubborn, blind, dedication to the thing that artists most love doing, which is making art.

The fact that 68% of the artists interviewed say that they do not follow any specific role models but prefer to develop their own 'self' is an indication of the degree of self-belief, or even egocentricity, that many artists seem to possess. For example, as Beverly Pepper, the most established and the most senior artist (aged 84) I interviewed,



explained that it is the personal strength and egotism inherent in the artist's personality that allows the artist to sustain and maintain their practice:

'I've always worked for myself; I've never worked for an audience. That's basically because my original trade was in advertising, and then I *only* worked for an audience. So that when I became my own person I only worked for myself. And I think, anyway, all good artists only work for themselves'.

(Interview Codebook [I][BP1][84][F][Scu][Pro][US/Ita])

Or as the early career artist Daniella Norton explained in her answer to my question:

'What does it mean to you to be an artist?'

'I think of it as being something that's quite selfish in a way. Like I've given myself permission to be really selfish for the whole of my life, and to kind of care about this thing, but it means that when you're involved with this thing, you're not caring about other people, or other people's issues, or any of that, and kind of putting that aside to think about this thing....'

(Interview Codebook [I][DN8][31][F][Pnt][Stu][UK])

This kind of egotistical approach coupled with artists' tendency to pursue a career that is essentially vocational, positions them in a category of risk takers, professionally, (Filer, 1986, p.57; Abbing, 2002, p.117) and contradicts the notion of artists as 'selfless' individuals who do not seek any reward from their work (all of those interviewed said that they will continue to practice as an artist even if after 10 years they will not be able to generate enough money to sustain their personal life). The

pursuit of personal, internal, reward which the artists identified as feeling happy, content, and physiologically fulfilled, rather than preferring external, material, rewards (Abbing, 2002, p.82) helps the artist to endure while existing on a minimum or no income, and with lack of professional acknowledgement. This also gives the artist the opportunity to stay focused on their belief that what they do is their destiny, rather than being a deliberate business/career decision. However, I believe that my own 'selfless' (Abbing, 2002) production of artwork, in which my investment is far greater than any reward I received, functions as a compromise with prevailing art market conditions and the contemporary 'risk society' where a consideration of risk prevails in any employment and especially self-employment (Erickson, 2009, p.114; Beck, 1992), and as soon I am able to generate money from the production of my artworks, I limit my 'selflessness', such as producing work for free, and I stop exchanging my work for non-monetary rewards such as experience, catalogue publications, articles, CV upgrades, free residencies, or travel tickets. My 'selfless' production of art is therefore largely dictated by the needs of the market and society, which seek the myths of the self-abnegating artist I am presumed to be.

Egotism, selfish behaviour, stubbornness, risk-taking behaviour, and a lack of knowledge about the artist's professional field, as discussed throughout this thesis were all identified by many of the artists I interviewed, and these qualities were also seen to be responsible for artists' isolation and their reluctance to acknowledge the challenging conditions, and the hardship and poverty that many of them experience in their practice (Abbing, 2002; Bain, 2005). Artists' ignorance and lack of knowledge-based research allows them to pursue their own particular path, so that part of their artistic identity and personal history then acts as a part of the artist's professional identity, or as their professional 'brand'. However, this involves a kind of alienation that emphasizes the secretive nature of the way artists operate in society, and this is an element that is often

used subsequently by the art market to manipulate their background history, and to promote artists as 'brand-names'.

Because of these weaknesses in the artist's professional position, instead of changing direction and pursuing a more conventional career path, artists are more likely to choose to continue their practice in isolation, or within an artist's community that shares the same vocational values, as discussed by Erickson (2002, 2009) and Weber (1948). In addition, McNiff's (1977) discussion of the artist's psychological motivations identifies their desire to concentrate their attention on the inner fulfillment provided by a vocational profession rather than to seek monetary reward. According to Abbing (2002) and Gulbenkian Foundation research (1983) on artists as well as my interview analysis, many artists indicated that they are unlikely to change their profession, because they frequently think that they are ill-equipped for other professional careers (to the interview question: 'What alternative career would you pursue instead of being an artist? Why?' 81% responded that they will get other jobs to sustain their practice in art, but 99% said they would not abandon their practice as artists). For these reasons artists pursue their practice within their own community where they feel adequate and secure, but as with any isolated group there are risks involved in this strategy and so they may, as a result, continue to be abused by the more knowledgeable or financially sophisticated stakeholders in the art markets.

In Pierre Bourdieu's (1994, p.139) essay 'But who created the 'Creators?' he attempts to analyse which elements contribute to 'the genius, or the greatest artists'. He states that 'the question to ask is not what the artist creates, but who creates the artist', and emphasises that it is not the work of art that endows an artist with high status but it is the 'rarity of the producer, manifested by the (artist's) signature', and the influence of the artist's promotion. He says 'the transmuting power that the artist exercises' is responsible for the 'collective belief in the value of the producer and his product' (in a

way similar to a 'brand') (Bourdieu, 1994, p.147). Indeed, while comparing artists to other professionals Abbing (2002, p.114) identified that the art market for artists operates on different terms from those of non-art market, for example from the distribution of salaries in 'the winner-takes-all principle' to the non-monetary reward market structure where artists' professional overconfidence and self-delusion prevails. These differences between the art market and other professional markets encourage artists to 'overestimate the rewards available to them in the arts', and their naivety about their position (ibid) makes them ripe for abuse by art market forces and its stakeholders. From my point of view the notion of the selfish/selfless artist results in the widespread underestimation of the reward that artists should be receiving for their products, and their own ignorance and lack of awareness firmly places them inside the 'unprofessional mavericks' category. This has also resulted in early career artists perceiving their practice as a hobby as much as a profession, which is largely a result of the artist's misperceptions about the conditions of the art market and/or a lack of experience in their practice.

However, some data that I obtained during the interviews shows that 36% of the artists are alert to ways in which the art market and other external conditions can abuse them. Moreover Bourdieu's search for greater understanding about 'who creates the creators', cannot probe further beyond those factors that I have already discussed in relation to society's impact on artists' decision-making, and on their artistic production. I believe to gain a more complete understanding of artists they should be further investigated by other disciplines other than sociology and psychology, specifically, and I believe that it's possible that a neurological perspective could also be beneficial. However, I would like to point out again that artists often do experience an unconditional desire to practice art that is not directly related to sociological influences, but has more to do with a personal ability or a talent which then becomes incorporated

into society's perception of 'art' and the profession of 'artist' (Art Council England, 2008).

Therefore, while I agree that society has considerable influence on the artists' decision-making processes, and on the work they produce as well as on elements of their personal life (90% of those interviewed believed that an artist's career can negatively affect their personal life), the question that still needs to be asked is not 'who created the creator?' but rather why/how is it possible to 'create a creator' in conditions that are apparently inadequate for the creator's practice? This question was analysed by Erickson (2002, 2009) and Abbing (2002) who eventually concluded that because vocationally based employments stick to their *own* vision of their chosen vocation which is a part of their life, it is this that allows them to pursue their work and become reconciled with 'sociological abuse'. Artists generally believe that they are unfit for 'normal' jobs (Abbing 2002, p.115; Gulbenkian Foundation, 1983) as artist Neale Worley indicates in his interview response: 'And also I possibly could not be employed doing anything else, anyway. Because, I am not qualified in anything else'. In addition, artists have the ability to substitute non-monetary for monetary reward (Gulbenkian Foundation research, 1983, pp.116-117), and they are also 'over-confident' and 'risk-taking' as discussed previously.

My own opinion about my professional practice as an artist is less complex than might be assumed from this study. For a successful practice I stubbornly produce art products while at the same time actively seeking financial resources from elsewhere. I network with wealthy individuals who are interested in commissioning my work, or who can afford to buy it or support its production. I maintain close relationships with many established artists and other professionals who, for example, help me to gain insights into how I can best achieve the kind of conditions I need for a successful practice. This requires a certain degree of diplomacy and sophistication in order to

become invited, accepted and to be trusted with the requisite personal information. In situations where I produced artwork that is non-commercial or which lacked immediate market appeal, I needed to seek out the necessary financial support from elsewhere that allowed me to continue the production of this ‘unprofitable’ type of work. However, such situations not only require additional personal skills, to prove to potential sponsors that both my work and I am worthy of investment. In addition, I also need to be able to spot the potential in those who might want to invest in me/my work, in spite of the idiosyncrasies of my personal character and my ‘unprofitable’ art works.

Finally, I am always ready to step out of the role of the full-time, self-employed artist as I am very aware of the ‘luck’ factor for the artist, that of ‘being in the right place at the right time’ (Sifakakis, 2002), which I see as a spurious element in the field of contemporary arts (which is presumed to be more sophisticated). At this stage, the art market appears to me to be an investment ‘playground’ for rich individuals, multinational corporations, and even for nation states or regional policy makers. Whether or not an artist is successful appears to be largely influenced by random factors such as personal circumstances, having the right family background, education, location, nationality, and other non-art related social factors. Instead, I am, along with most of the artists I interviewed, ready to work in other professional fields to earn my living, and to practice my art for my own fulfillment and inner satisfaction as an unpaid job.

## Chapter 5. To be, or not to be, a self-employed contemporary visual artist?

*'I would like to tell you, this is the last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – artists decide to be artists. When I was young, almost every colleague I had or friend who was in the art world as an artist, didn't decide – they were'.*

(Interview Codebook [I][BP1][84][F][Scu][Pro][US/Ita])

For the conclusion of this study, I summarise the outcomes of self-reflective practice-based investigation in external conditions and the results from the qualitative survey of artists' internal conditions and decision-making mechanisms that negatively influence artists' professional and personal practice at the early stage of their career. In the final part of this chapter, IV- *Hope for the better consequences*, I express my personal point of view as an artist and also suggest, from the point of view of the researcher, the future need to study artists' external and internal conditions affecting their professional life. The title of this chapter, *To be or not to be a self-employed contemporary visual artist*, was derived from my primary question, which inspired me to conduct this study in the first place. After many years of practice and education attempting to find the next step to progress in my career as a visual artist I needed to find the information that would help me make the decision whether or not to continue the struggle to find the niche for my work in the art market. After reviewing the main findings of the research I found myself in an even more confusing situation. As a researcher I understand that the conditions for practicing my art can't accustom me to the future, but as an artist following my vocational call I still cannot stop practising art, which is similar to most

of the interviewed artists. This dilemma will be discussed as the final step of this study.

## I. Extrinsic conditions relating to the emergence of artists practice: the unfair reward system, the deficiency of professional information, and the esoteric way in which art organisations operate

The conditions I experienced during the practice-based component of this study were often echoed by comments made by the artists I interviewed, many of whom indicated that they had no choice but to seek additional income by taking other jobs in order to meet their basic living expenses and to support their artistic practice; more than half of them did not expect to make a profit from their work as professional artists. Artists' acceptance of conditions where they are obliged to provide their labour for free, or to agree to work for future benefits not only can reduce the quality of their artistic production (Chapter 3/II) but also contradicts the primary social convention where paid work is the equivalent of gainful employment status. Therefore, artists who do not receive wages for their work are viewed by society as having a low or questionable professional status. In addition, such artists' employer/agents have a tendency to justify their frequent non-payment by explaining how much artists' will benefit from exhibiting in their premises, or through the printed materials they offer, or from publicity and promotion, or from gaining work experience, etc., which the artist might consider to be fair trade, but such 'fair trade' leads them towards a vicious circle of exploitation of their artistic labour and has a negative effect on their professional status or integrity.



The lack of a structured work routine that faces most artists also forced me to work unsocial hours for long periods of time, as public art events often open in the evening. This may be a factor that contributes to the widely held notion that artists are types who stay in bed till noon and then hang around all night ‘networking’, as well as to notions that artists’ erratic lifestyles can induce ‘eccentric’ behaviour such as promiscuity, manic mood swings, alcohol abuse (which often aims to stimulate potential art buyers’ into an impulse purchase, as exhibition openings usually offer visitors free alcohol) and according to most of the artists interviewed, all these factors can have a detrimental effect on their lives and the lives of their families. These are common behavioural patterns and result from the hurdles that artists must overcome in order to follow their artistic career. In the contemporary ‘risky’ and commercially orientated society (Beck, 1978) it is difficult for the artist not to remain anything other than self-absorbed or as egotistic as they can possibly be. The vagaries of the external conditions they must confront force them to be on the defensive, in order to protect themselves, and to minimise the possibility of additional hazards. However, artists also frequently need to seek emotional and financial support from their family and friends, and this need conflicts with the necessity that they be self-centred, selfish or stubborn, in order to procure sufficient physical and psychological support from the society that surrounds them and to be able to produce their work in the first place; this is a basic contradiction at the heart of the ‘alienated’ and ego-centric artist stereotype.

Information that is necessary for artists to operate within public art organisations is also difficult to access for an outsider because of the secretive nature of art institutions and their obscure methods for the accreditation and validation of the artist and their artwork (Sifakakis, 2004), all of which, I believe, should be further investigated. From my practice and research, artists often hold a negative view of fellow artists who have a strong financial motivation or whose ultimate goal is to make

large profits (Wolfe, 1975; Henri, [1923]2007). This attitude can result in an artist rejecting the conventional art market and practicing as ‘mavericks’, in parallel with it (Becker, 1982). However, the most negative outcome may often be the artist’s wholesale rejection of the value of *any* knowledge relating to the business and operation of conventional or unconventional art establishments, arts organisations, and art markets (Robertson, 2005, pp.27-28).

In some cases this attitude is a result of the lack of available time, or finances, or else if the artist does have access to this knowledge, they are unable to apply it to their practice because it is perceived, fundamentally, to be superfluous rather than being useful. For example, even when I knew that it would be useful and preferable for me to collate the responses of the public to my work or exhibition so I could then assess the negative and positive public feedback, or network with those in the potential local market, and thus apply it to my future work in the region during Case studies 1, 2, and 3, I was unable to undertake these tasks because the irregularity of my working conditions had left me exhausted, and without sufficient time.

If an artist does not have the necessary support to remain in full-time, self-employed practice they must still maintain a position where they will be noticed by dealers and potential buyers and must create self-managed exhibitions of their work (Stallabrass, 2006, p.52), or network with the ‘right people’ (Thornton, 2008). Based upon my experience, in the prevailing conditions of the contemporary art market, which are unpredictable and intensely competitive, all this is difficult enough to achieve even with sufficient financial backing. In these conditions an artist may face repeated rejection, or else be ignored or overlooked by the art establishment, or find it very difficult to become accustomed to the kind of restrictions that the market’s stakeholders impose, with the result that an artist may perceive that they have no choice but to follow their own path. In this study I have described such artists as

‘unprofessional mavericks’ in comparison with Becker’s ‘mavericks’ who *do* possess a professional understanding of how the established/conventional art world works, but who do not want to remain in it. The ‘unprofessional mavericks’ in this study are therefore not obliged to make an assessment of their work/practice within the context of the practices of the established art world, because they have not been accepted by it. If these artists have secure conditions of practice and have acquired sufficient income from other sources, they are in a position to continue along their own ‘deviant’ path in their practice, until such time that they find their work is recognized by the art establishment, or when they receive public acclaim. In my research most early career artists who have to deal with this type of market ‘alienation’ from the conventional art establishment (with the exception of those picked up by dealers from graduation exhibitions of established art schools) also have a similar challenging pattern of work conditions to those that I faced, as described in Chapter 3.

In this way many artists, after they have mounted numerous exhibitions and shows that barely (if at all) cover the production and distribution costs involved, often become exhausted by their attempts to find alternative approaches. Many of these artists often become interested in political art and try to make a statement by using concepts, either to raise public awareness or to provoke, in order to become noticed. There is a vast range of antisocial or deviant behavior created by artists on record. Although such methods of achieving recognition and acceptance by the art market might be considered a unique phenomenon, it is true to say that there are fairly typical conditions to which artists will often be required to respond and they do so with extreme behaviour, which requires a specific personality that can sustain the pressures of performing in an intense manner while creating their artwork; a good example of this is Oleg Kulik (DVD film, Case study 3; CD, Additional materials, Catalogue, pp. 12-13). Moreover, once an artist starts doing this type of artwork they will need to

maintain creating sensational works for an indeterminate period of time in order to achieve market recognition and to establish a history of artwork sales. Nowadays ‘contemporary artists seek to exhibit at state-funded institutions as a means to validate their work, which can lead to higher prices charged by their commercial dealers’ (Chong, 2005) and thus they should possess the high managerial skills required to be able to work with publicly funded institutions.

In the first place, while an increasing number of artists amongst those who have recently graduated employ sensationalist themes in their work, their work also, I believe, reflects a shift in the preferences of art consumers. Shock tactics or the production of sensationalist work is more rooted as a phenomenon than one might at first believe. One example, which Peter Plagens referred to in his review of the book *Seven Days in the Art World* by Sarah Thornton (Art in America magazine, November, 2008, pp. 41-44), happened in 2004 when a UCLA student faked his own suicide using a loaded gun, in the style of Russian roulette, in the class of professor/artist Chris Burden (ARTINFO, 2008) whose own artwork has included self-crucifixion and being shot.

This cycle of the abuse of artists by the market, in which an artist is forced to become an ‘art-terrorist’ in order to be publicly noticed, is not the only guide available for artists. There is a famous story told in art history about Vincent van Gogh that is dearly loved by the public, where he is depicted as a mad genius who cuts off his ear and then shoots himself. This is held up as a simulacrum for the behaviour of many contemporary artists who are accepted by society as geniuses. It is implied that artists, as unrecognized geniuses, should on the one hand be forgiven for their madness and antisocial attitudes, and for their behaviour as ‘mavericks’ as they bring new points of view or insights into the rules and conventions of our society, while on the other hand they must also ‘misbehave’ and are perceived as the ‘deviant’ artist. When I asked the

artists if they thought a moral and ethical code should be introduced for professional artists, they expressed concern that this might restrict their ‘artistic license’ but in case ‘artistic license’ allows for abusive acts to other members of our society the moral and ethical dimensions of the artist as professional should be considered similar to other professions.

## II. Intrinsic decision to be an artist

*‘...realised I still wanted to do art, and be an artist – or carry on making my work, because I wasn’t happy in anything else. So...its sort of something that was more and more reinforced as I grew up. It wasn’t something that I decided one day.... I’m going to be an artist and now....it wasn’t like... “Oh Yeah, I’m going to grow up and become a doctor”. It was just more gradual...and I’ve kind of carried on...’*

(Interview Codebook [I][EA3][28][F][Pnt][Extra][GR/UK])

Responding to the question ‘How do you define art?’ 80% of recent MFA graduates and mid career/established artists defined art in the following ways: inspiration, belonging to their feelings, a way of seeing, a means of communication, a part of their personal creativity, psychological reality, a path of life. Most of the artists pursued art as a vocation and were supported by their social network (including family, friends, peers) and were also given the opportunity to practice art from a young age; they identified art as spirituality or inspiration.

Meanwhile, 63% of the same sample defined art as a product, or a production, that involved the making of works such as painting, sculpture and so on, which were

also derived from inspirations and feelings, and were personal creative acts. In addition, 36% of the artists showed an awareness of how social and cultural factors influence the ways in which art is defined when they explained that in many contemporary situations definitions of art tend to be imposed by external forces emanating from art institutions, governmental bodies, the art market, or from the general public rather than coming from the artists themselves.

Finally, artists' motivation to explore the 'unknown' – or as McNiff (1977) indicated, artists' desire to 'explore, find knowledge and reduce the uncertainty' of their reality through their practice – is the major factor causing these artists to not specifically define *art*, because they see their process as a continual search for the right answer that they, as yet, do not possess (McNiff, 1998).

'This is a question that people are always asking, and of course once everyone thinks they know what Art is, then the Artist – they go and do something different.... always.... this is what happens. So in this sense, Art is always an attempt to make something that is a new, a... a new psychological reality'.

(Interview Codebook [I][IM15][NoAge][NoGen][Pnt][Extra][NoNatn])

However intense or clearly defined motives to create art were, those artists who identified art as a vocation (in fact, half of those interviewed) explained that they had acquired the ability to draw, paint, or create artworks when they were very young, and often this ability made them stand out, and was recognised by their peers. Moreover, a significant amount of those interviewed came from families where one or both parents, and/or other relatives worked as artists themselves. These outcomes showed that apart from the inner motivation to follow their career they had also been encouraged and

influenced by their immediate social network. On one hand artists are nourished by the society within which they grow up (family, friends, teachers and peers) and on the other hand they pursue their career as a vocation, a lifestyle, with or without the knowledge about how the art market operates positioning artists in a hazardous situation of abuse. Indeed, in case the stakeholders are aware that artists will continue to produce art regardless of the financial reward there is no incentive for them to pay a fair price for their product, at least during an artist's establishment, and as it often happens they exchange artists' production for the possibility to be exhibited, enhancement of their CV or an appearance of their work in a publication or catalogue. Nevertheless, this situation cannot be improved by making artists aware of the existing problem because they do not possess the necessary practical experience and skills to change the mode of practice, and also because their psychological condition to practice art as a vocation will not allow them to stop producing art for free. As previously shown, this experience can only come through systematic practice, without which, artists after graduation start to seek any opportunity possible or to create their own experiences by applying their personal finances and labour. Thus it is the education sector's responsibility to provide the information and practice for potential self-employed artists, otherwise the BFA, MFA and foundation courses in fine arts will continue to not produce professionals, but rather ecstatically orientated graduates (Oh, 2009).

On the other side, the artists indicated that managerial skills are the secondary subjects they would consider studying during their art education and some did not consider it a necessity. However, as I pointed out, artists often are afraid to state their need for business skills as it can be viewed negatively by their community as a loss of integrity towards art. In the case where the educational structure will require artists to study professional development as a major subject it will allow artists to stop being

frustrated with the idea of losing their professional integrity and to see professional business skills as a necessity to survive as professionals rather than seeking secondary jobs to sustain making art for free or barely covering the cost of the production.

### III. 'Art is whatever is called art'

Many meanings of *art* that have been constructed in the past – *high skills, fine art product, craft* – have now shifted, as stated by the interviewed artists, for whom art is *personal inspiration, a way of seeing, self-expression* and a tool for *communication, cultural product, etc.* This is an indication that the defining mechanisms of the discipline cover multiple meanings that are personal to the stakeholders in the arts (Chapter 1/I, 4/II). This diversification, on the one hand, can be seen as beneficial for artists because it brings opportunities to freely create new forms and practices in art, and it's the 'neo-geo' (Sim, 1999, p.89) the new materials, and forms, on the other hand, which enable artists to redefine their art as experimental. But, apart from the artists themselves, other stakeholders in the arts often tend to do something similar, in that they begin to construct new definitions that will shape new identities to conform with what *they* think art should mean or should look like or function for, despite the case that it may contradict artists' definitions of art. This brings further confusion into the defining mechanisms in the visual arts.

Consequently, art seems to be whatever artists and stakeholders in the arts attribute to it's meaning. This not only creates difficulty in identifying what art as a professional discipline consists with and its functionality, but it also negatively effects artists' own identity as professionals and their status in the society in which they operate because "artistic labour is seldom recognized as 'real' work" (Bain, 2005, p.25;



Chapter 1/I). Moreover, negative interventions made by art institutions on the defining mechanisms surrounding art and the artist have been supported by quantitative research methods, and this has resulted in misleading generalisations becoming attached to perceptions of artists' conditions and experiences. Also, the shift in which the artwork became of secondary importance in the art market after the artist's persona should be acknowledged. Often carefully constructed by the artists themselves, artists respond with self-image-making, a process which in this study I described as the creation of the 'artist's aura'. I developed the term 'artist's aura' from Walter Benjamin's (Benjamin, [1935]1969) identification of the loss of 'aura' of the original artwork but diverted it to the artist's persona rather than the works of art they produce. While giving examples from the then new art media of his time, including film, photography, and prints, Benjamin discussed the loss of 'authenticity of the original work during its reproduction, and its transformation into art as 'design for reproduction'. He argues that the function of art has shifted from cult value or 'rituals' to serving 'politics' (Benjamin, [1935]1969, pp.217-253). However, in this research study I attribute the word 'aura' not to the work of the artist but to the artist himself, while simultaneously referring to the artist's personal image-making or the construction of a personal 'brand' (signature, personal behaviour, life-story, public behaviour) that serves neither 'rituals' nor 'politics' but the art market. It helps the artist to acquire status and recognition in a consumer-orientated society, which thereby benefits them commercially. I believe that the interviewed artists' hesitation in answering the question about their family's help and financial support during their education and establishment process, personal influences and role models, and financial expenditure, are related to the protection of personal information, which can alter the artist's image and public opinion, and its perception by the market. This issue should be researched further in order to understand the psychology and influence of the artists' understanding and involvement

in the construction of their 'aura'/'brand'/'self-image'/'persona'/'signature'. The significance of this knowledge can be in looking into how artists are adapting into the marketing mechanisms of our consumer society and to what extent they can provide the right ingredients and fulfil the market needs.

In addition, artist's personalities become ever more important than the artwork they produce (Chapter 1/ VI; Klein, 1994, p.8). The 'artist's aura' is often constructed in advance and involves elements that include their art college education, ethnicity, gender, nationality, locale, personal anecdotes and can involve the change of the artist's name into a more attractive or memorable pseudonym. Moreover, the artist's psychological impulse to pursue the business of art as a vocation regardless of financial return and the importance of constructing their 'brand' for effective recognition creates a dynamic where the artist's personality becomes of equivalent importance as the artwork itself and as a result merges with the works of art they produce.

This transition in which the market sees the artist's persona serving a primary role in the evaluation of the artwork produced by the artist (Chapter 1/ IV) together with the confusion in defining art as a discipline, as discussed in this study, along with changing art market value towards the originality of artistic production above its quality, and replacement of criticism with self-reflective writing (ibid), suggests the necessity to re-examine the defining and operating system of the art and artist.

#### IV. Hope for the better consequences

The outcomes of this study positioned me in a dilemma of which point-of-view to discuss the finding of the research: from the point-of-view of the researcher into visual arts, or from that of the practicing artist. The conclusions from both perspectives vary

in nature. As an artist, the research did not answer my personal question: To be or not to be a contemporary self-employed visual artist? Rather on the contrary it added to this quest more complications. As a researcher, the conditions of artists' practice revealed in this study made me question artists' professional status and establishment, as well as the integrity of the visual art market in general. Therefore, in this conclusion I will consider the point-of-view of both the researcher and the practicing artist.

The negative aspect of professional self-employed visual artist's practice in the beginning of career establishment appeared to be much more profound than I originally anticipated. Firstly, the study helped me to identify that the conditions and influences on the earlier career artist's operation in nowadays art market are inadequate to consider visual art as a full time profession. No appropriate defining system of the discipline, no structural reward system for the work produced, questionable evaluation mechanisms of the production and distribution of art work by art institutions, high risk in investing personal time and money with no guarantee of returns, and so on, showed the case that the career of an artist can't be seen as straightforward employment, but rather a lifestyle. The establishment of an artist is based upon the possibility of an MFA graduate supporting themselves using money acquired from elsewhere (rather than from the sale of their work) to produce the necessary bulk of work as a first step, and networking within well-to-do society to generate sales of the artworks as a second step. Besides this, the earlier career artist will need to have additional business, curatorial and creative writing skills in order to sustain their practice for an unknown period of time.

Secondly, before undertaking this study I was not able to find an answer to my primary research question of whether or not to follow the artist's path because the results of the interview survey on a wider population of artists showed that despite possessing knowledge about the hazardous practices and systems operating and

affecting the artist and their work, an inner vocational calling to continue being an artist will not allow me to stop producing artworks; physically or sociologically I cannot control this decision. This vocational calling identified by most of the interviewed earlier/mid/established artists should be further investigated and researched in art related academic disciplines and from a sociological standpoint. Also, artists' family influences in relation to their motivation to follow an artistic profession should also be further investigated.

Many of the artists explained how arduous their work is. They pointed out how their work required constant attention, in addition to having to deal with their day-to-day existence. Neale Worley explained: '...as an artist you are dealing with yourself, and where there are a lot of jobs you are doing jobs for other people essentially'. Or according to MFA graduate Huw Bartlett: 'It would be nice to give yourself a holiday when you didn't think about art...that not a minute goes by that...you know you're always open...I never switch off'. Such work patterns together with financial and social restraints negatively affect artists' personal relationships, according to the answers I collated from the questionnaires (Appendices, Questionnaire sample [Q16]). Nevertheless, many successful artists are portrayed in the contemporary media in quite a different way. I accept that it is very entertaining to read about Damien Hirst's night life, career, and work but after a while it also becomes somewhat predictable, and that is fair enough, because there are, in general, not that many options available for artists. They range between that of the 'tormented and abused artist' as in the case of Tracy Emin, or the 'cutting edge entertainer' such as Hirst. Is this the kind of thing our society needs today from visual artists? Or is this just a passing fashion, just a sideshow? I rather think it is often both. As artist Craig Fisher said in his interview:

‘I remember Frank Stella ... one day he said to me ... ‘we don’t really have.... we don’t work. Because I was saying I’ve got to go to work, and he was saying...you don’t work, you’re an artist, we don’t work, we play’.

(Interview Codebook [I][CF10][55][M][Pnt][Pro][US])

Similarly Leslie Dick, tutor/writer from California Institute of the Arts, quoted by Sarah Thornton (2008) stated:

‘The work you do as an artist is really play, but it is play in the most serious sense’

(Thornton, 2008, p.51).

In my practice as an artist I did not feel that I could ‘play around’ in any sense, because financial restraints and the lack of an adequate income forced me to make sacrifices in my personal life, and to exploit any sources of financial aid available to me. As I had no defined pattern of work and was frequently forced to work long hours, travel vast distances, and experience gruelling working and living conditions in the service of art, these factors often threatened my commitment to produce my work regardless. However, as a result of vocational calling, amounting to a cocktail of stubbornness, mischievousness, pretence, ‘risk-taking’ behaviour, and arrogance, I still doggedly continue to uphold my decision to be an artist. Even when I was convinced that my rigorous international arts education had provided me with all the relevant ‘know-how’ that an artist requires, as I later discovered, I was mistaken. There appeared to be a huge gap between the theoretical and the practical aspects of being an artist, for example the meaning of ‘success’ in our consumer-orientated society requires the development of a particular artistic style or ‘brand’ so that it can be immediately

recognised, and this may be far removed from the original notions of ‘artistic inspiration’, motivation, or from the quality of the craftsmanship that is attributed to artists in the past.

I am able to pursue my practice as an artist as part of my personal life, as an expensive hobby. Although this choice may be regarded as eccentric, it is full of interest, but it remains hazardous as it can lead to absolutely nothing except simply adding to the many tales of struggling, impoverished artists that already populate the art history books. I hope, nevertheless, that awareness may result from this research, that it can provide useful knowledge for the researchers who investigate the realities of artists’ ‘playful professional path’. Moreover, I hope this study will encourage another scholar in the field to further research artists’ motivations to create their art, and which might in turn offer some correctives to the misleading interpretations or perceptions of artists’ life experiences within contemporary society. The contradiction between artists’ psychological impulses to pursue the business of art as a vocation and that of the socio-economic effects of the contemporary art market is complex, and is very difficult to assess, so it should be further studied.

As a researcher, I hope that this research may offer artists some insider information to help them modify or reduce their tendency to exploit themselves, or be abused for the sake of art (and also by the art institutions), and might also help them to assess their motives, aims, and objectives in a more realistic and informed way, rather than just blindly following their vocational calling to make art. In this way the knowledge and practical skills the early career artist has acquired may help them to distribute their art product in a more efficient way, which in turn increases the opportunities for successful future collaborations, for references, and for networking, all of which have a beneficial effect on the distribution of the artists’ product.

However, in cases where an early career artist has not received the benefits of financial

backing, and is not in the position to invest the time required to practice these skills, they may as a result have to deal with conditions that are stressful, and face difficulties when having to compete with other artists who are able to practice with monetary support and on a full-time basis. I have shown in the case studies that setting up an exhibition requires an artist to network, and often to travel long distances to assess the installation of works, and also to invest considerable sums of money to support the production of this work, long before they receive any reimbursement, and in some cases they are asked to provide all these services for free. All of this is in addition to having to summon up the creativity and inspiration to actually produce the artwork.

Should society, the market, or any other stakeholder care about artists' decision making mechanisms, the numerous roles they must perform, and or whether or not they are 'conventional', 'mavericks', or 'unprofessional mavericks', or about what their conditions or decision-making mechanisms are when according to artists' own testaments, they are simply doing what they do as a part of their natural calling, a desire for a certain lifestyle, and out of their egotistical need to 'play'? Why should anyone care about the struggles and risks they must endure in pursuit of their art when the artists themselves cannot change the realities of the art market system within which they function? Nevertheless, it the artists who should seek to improve their professional conditions and I sincerely hope that this study will be a valuable resource for academia to help earlier career artists make the attempt to improve their professional conditions.

## Appendices

### Interview sample

Transcription of video interview with artist immi

immi [IM15] [NoAge] [NoGen] [Pnt] [extra] [NoNatn]

*Location: London, at the artist' house*

*Date: 2007*

Nina: So why are you an artist?

Immi: I'm...many times I have tried to stop being an artist but I find it is not so easy to stop.

Nina: Why?

Immi: Because you have....I have an idea and the only way I can deal with the idea is to make the artwork.

Nina: And can you identify what does it mean to you to be an artist?

immi: It is a big problem for me, and I often wish that I ...my brains was working in a different fashion.

Nina: What type of fashion?

immi: More in straightforward fashion.

00:01:15

Nina: So how do you define art?

immi: This is question that people are always asking, and of course once everyone think they know what art is, then the artists – they go and do something



different....always....this is what happens. So in this sense, art is always an attempt to make something that is a new, a... a kind of create...a new psychological reality.

Nina: So...is it what you did?

immi: Well, I think that's what I do, yes.

00:02:02

Nina: How do you think the occupation of the artist differs from other professions?

immi: I think it differ because first of all it is not necessarily for anybody to have the art, and I think it is different because it psychologically very dangerous profession for somebody, and not just psychologically I think, I have seen many artists – very intelligent people who have completely ruined their life by being an artist.

Nina: How did they do it? Something happened to them, or they spent too much effort, or they have no money back? What type of ruin?

immi: They...they devote their life to being an artist and in return they get absolutely nothing.

00:03:03

Nina: And they have been good artists?

immi: They might be good artists, yes.

Nina: So you think it's a dangerous profession?

immi: I think it's very dangerous.

Nina: Is it er....for you, dangerous?

immi: I think for me it, yes of course it has been a problem, yes.

Nina: So you are afraid it can be er...a problem in the future?

Like I say I sometimes, I am trying to stop being an artist.

Nina: So if you wish...you would stop.

immi: Sometimes I have stopped, and then I find that I am starting again.

00:03:47

Nina: How do you explain your work to others, and people who you don't know?

immi: Well I think the work of art, it must be captivating and when you...for the person when they see it. This is very important. And I think the explanation must always be if you like the secondary moment, but of course the explanation can be part of the work of art, and it can be very interesting, but I truly believe that the first experience, when you encounter the work of art, when you don't know anything about it, when you look at it, or hear it, or smell it, or touch it for the first time – this must be captivating.

00:04:37

Nina: So if you meet me in the street, and I ask “Hi immi! How are you doing? So, what do you do now?” And you tell me.... “I'm working, I'm doing my artwork”. So what do you do right now?

immi: No, I will tell you that I'm working now in a shop, selling jewellery.

Nina: Really?

immi: Yes.

Nina: And in the meantime you are painting?

immi: No, I was painting in one period, and recently I tried to organize an exhibition but unfortunately it was not possible.

Nina: Hmm. Why it wasn't possible?

immi: We had problems...the legal problems.

Nina: Of yours?

immi: Well not my problem, but the gallerist found it was too difficult, too dangerous for him to organize the exhibition, so I had to cancel the exhibition.

00:05:32

Nina: So what exactly happened in terms of legal things...?

immi: I ...I proposed some works of art, and he called to the lawyers, and the lawyers said to him it is not a good idea to make these works of art.

Nina: So what was the works of art?

immi: The works of art it was an idea that I should imagine myself in the position of a terrorist, and I should imagine what kind of works of art would be good for my terrorist project. And these works...the lawyers tell...tell us can be against the law in this country (UK).

Nina: Hmm...We will come back to this question later.

00:06:31

Nina: The next question is: - How and when did you decide to become an artist?

immi: I never decide...this...this was decided for me, when I was a little boy.

Nina: Who decided it?

immi: It was part of my psychology.

Nina: So your parents saw your psychology and took you to art school, or what happened...?

immi: My parents they always realised that I could be an artist, I think.

Nina: Since the...since the age of...?

immi: Since a very early age. Yes.

00:07:03

Nina: How did it happen...I mean, did you draw constantly, or ...?

immi: I made a lot of drawings. I made comics. I made films. Yes, when I was a boy.

immi: Maybe there was some question because I...there was interested in other things, but I think it was clear from a very early age that maybe I will be an artist.

00:07:43

Nina: So, I don't know how long you have been in practice, but would you continue to practice as an artist if after more than 10 years you would not be able to generate enough money to live?

immi: Well, you know, I don't generate the money to live from making of the art at the moment, and so I don't, I can't answer this question.

Nina: Hmm....so the money you live on, and create your art, is from jewellery?

immi: From the working in the shop, yes.

00:08:23

Nina: OK, OK. And....do you think that, if you don't generate the money out of art work, and you don't pay taxes from what you do, you are actually not that profession, er....of the artist, yes? So if you not generate the money out of artwork, you generate the money out of something else, then you are not the artist, you are something else?

immi: I don't know the answer to that question. I don't see it like this, because of course there are many professional artists who produce the work that is not really interesting, but they are the professional artists because they spend their whole life, and they make the money. And there are other artists who do not spend their whole life because they do not make the money, but they make the more interesting work. And so I don't think it is...that is an important issue.

00:09:33

Nina: How does art market here or elsewhere operate?

immi: How does (it) operate? Well I think art market depends on rich people. I think the rich people....most of the rich people are very busy, because they are working hard or because their money enable them to do many things - travel to here, there, everywhere. Have many friends ....So rich people are always very busy, and so they spend a little bit of time choosing the art. And so they don't know very much about art. And so its like buying the clothes, maybe. They have the brand that they like, or that their friends like, or that is fashionable for them in their circle, and this is the brand that they like to buy.

00:10:43

immi: And I think that art market, top of art market works like this. I think that when you go to bottom of art market, you find....of course you find the people who are interested, who are looking all the time, the curators, the beginning galleries, the artists themselves, and er...but as far as the art market...as far as we talk about this, I think that it is based on the rich people who are looking for the brands.

00:11:28

Nina: OK, you said to me that you are doing jewellery sales, I'm sure, but OK, if you were to choose an alternative career, instead of being an artist, which one would you choose?

immi: I...that's very interesting, I...I think maybe, I would maybe write the books, or possibly maybe work in the legal profession – this is quite interesting....

Nina: Why?

immi: I think it's interesting to have er...a kind of structure of rules if you like, or a kind of structure of a very complicated game in which you try to work. I think I find this a quite interesting idea.

00:12:24

Nina: How do you see your success as an artist?

immi: I don't know what success you are talking about?

Nina: OK, define for me what do you think is success as a career person....

immi: I think there are two stages. One is when you have the idea that you make the er...the satisfying and the expressive resolution of the idea. This is success for you as an artist, but then in the ...you find the work go into the world and it has to er.. have success with the public. This is like the second stage of the success.

Nina: So you don't define success as money you generate out of your art, or being able to support your family out of your craft?

immi: Yes of course this is the second stage of success. If this...if the work has success at the second stage then you will get the money, and its.....

Nina: So...on which level of success are you now?

immi: I can only myself with the first stage of success.

00:13:53

Nina: How important do you think it is to be a good manager of your own career?

immi: Well I think some artists are very good managers of their own career and I very much admire these types of artist. I find for me it is not interesting to do these things.

Nina: So who would manage your career?

immi: Well at the moment I have one or two people interested a little bit in what I do.

00:14:27

Nina: In case you are asked to give advice to emerging or established artists as yourself, for their first step of success or recognition, what would you like to advise them to focus on in the beginning of their career,...straight after their graduation?

immi: Well I think if...if you are committed to being an artist, I think you must focus on your work. First point. Second point, I think you must go to the place, the centre of art, where there are many other artists. So you must go to London, to Berlin, and to New York, to one of the centres of artistic activity....

Nina: Why is it so?

immi: ...this is important because you will see much more interesting art in these places, you will meet the other artists. I think this is important. I spent several years in a kind of province – it's not such a good idea...

00:15:52

Nina: .... technical questions....Where do you prefer to exhibit your artworks?

immi: I think the place of the exhibition depends on the artwork....

Nina: For example?

immi: Some artwork is appropriate for the commercial gallery, and some artwork is appropriate for the street corner, it doesn't matter. But I...I generally am thinking about the gallery...yes.

Nina: What type of gallery? Commercial, public...?

immi: I think commercial gallery, yes, I am thinking about...

Nina: Why you think your artwork is suitable for commercial, than to public?

immi: I don't mind public galleries, but I don't have any contacts with them

00:16:39

Nina: Do you prefer to exhibit with other artists, or alone?

immi: Oh, I think if you can have exhibition for your own work – a one person, solo exhibition of course, this is best of all. It's quite a different context for your work, and it make a difference, I think, to the perception of your work.

00:17:01

Nina: So how do you usually approach galleries, exhibition spaces, or dealers?

immi: You know, I don't really approach, but if I meet some people, maybe in conversation some idea can emerge.

Nina: And which period of art history do you most admire?

I am very much interesting in post-war period, from 1950 to 1980s. I think the whole history of conceptual art I find very interesting.

Nina: Why?

immi: I think its for me its very stimulating material...er...I do not try to make very pure conceptual work, but its is very stimulating that is such, that exists such pure thinking about art.

00:18:11

Nina: And do you think the curator of work is important in your practice?... if you work with a curator...how important is it in your practice...or you didn't for example work with a curator?

immi: No, I haven't really worked with a curator whom I can have respect for particularly. I don't know how this work. I go to exhibitions which is created by curators, you know, and I think this kind of trick...you know I go to the big exhibitions maybe, and the Biennale maybe, or somewhere like that, and what you see, you see a lot of famous artists with famous work, maybe. And then you see a few new artists, no one ever heard of them, just to make an interesting mixture. I think this is a kind of cliché of the curators.

00:19:11

Nina: So do you think the curator is from the same round of rich individuals who hang around and try to make their careers, and sell to these rich people some art?

immi: No, I don't ...I think curators is profession now, yeah... it's a kind of job...you curate in one place, you curate in another place, you curate in another place. I don't know if its rich individuals, I don't think so particularly er...but it's a kind of profession...they are professional people, and...they have a job, and this is to look at art and to select these exhibitions. Erm...but I am not sure that curating...the curator is really a creative person. I am not sure about that.

00:20:08

Nina: So, to what extent do you consider yourself a curator of your own exhibition?

immi: Oh...I don't er...I think that I er...in a sense of course I picture the exhibition before I even have begin the work, so yeah....so I have a picture of the exhibition in my mind, yes, so I am a kind of curator, yes.

Nina: And you easily find ideas or concept for work, and er.. for the exhibition?

immi: Yes, my work always have a concept, yes.



00:20:56

Nina: What information would you like to obtain about art market and general...or general practice for your art?

immi: Huh! I don't know er... what information?

Nina: Maybe something you don't know, which you would like to find the answer for?

immi: You know, I don't...I don't ....I'm not too concerned with art market because I think its...it's a kind of...its this ...its this ...its this brands, that people are looking for. And so I don't have an illusion that I can discover something and suddenly all my works is very expensive. No, I don't think this, and so er...you know I like, I think I prefer art market to be for the galleries to think about, and I think about something else.

00:21:57

Nina: How would you like your artistic career to develop from now on?

immi: Oh I think it's er.. to have some possibilities, more possibilities to er...make exhibitions, you know ....

Nina: So this is one of the questions you would like to find, possibly?

immi: Well.....

Nina: ...How to make more exhibitions?

immi: ....Well, I think its depends on the individual circumstances of course.

Nina: How come?

immi: I think its just er.. its...naturally, you will...you will have to find...everyone must find his own...route, I think.

00:22:40

Nina: Did...or do you have a role model, from art world or personal life?

immi: You know, its very interesting...not very interesting. But I remember I...many times I remember I read books or... and someone in these books, they say "Oh I had a teacher at school, he was very important for my development". I never had a teacher at

school who was important in my development ....And I'm not quite sure, I don't understand the psychology of the person who say – this person for me very important..... I don't know..... There is artists, there are artists whose work I admire, but I don't think they can be for me role model, no. I don't think so.

00:23:40

Nina: So you never had some teenage time like...' I would really like to be like this guy', you know, and try to replicate....

immi: Oh...pro...pro...probably...yes, probably, but I don't remember who this was, is now....is so long ago, the teenagers....and teenagers like, you know, teenage girl, you know they have the same feelings, you know, for the pop stars, but it doesn't matter anymore. And they grow up.

00:24:16

Nina: Who funded your education to be an artist?

immi: My education it was in a...it was...I can't remember, but I think it was in a...there were no...no fees for the education that I had.

Nina: And during the education somebody paid your bills?

immi: Oh, I see. Well my ....how can I say...I lived at home.

Nina: So the parents were...?

immi: With my parents, yes.

Nina: How much did you spend for the education altogether, like erm...?

immi: I can't compare the cost of the....no I can't translate it into into pounds....

Nina: So you parents never asked you to return it back?

immi: No.

00:25:11

Nina: How do you price your art work for the exhibition or private sale?

immi: I think it's a question for gallerist.

Nina: But if the gallery is asking *you* - how much are you going to put?

immi: I don...I...I'm not...I don't create a problem. I think the gallerist want the same thing as what I want, and so I trust the gallerist.

00:25:37

Nina: Did you ever face moral issues affecting your art....

immi: Moral issues?

Nina: Yes....For example, did you or someone who you know who did the work deal with political and personal issues which led to the risk of them facing the judgmental reaction from public observing it, and how you dealt with it?

immi: Yes I...I did have the big problem with my exhibition and eventually the gallerist, he cancelled the exhibition.

Nina: Is it that you discussed about terrorism, yes?

immi: Yes.

Nina: OK....so the dealing with it was just to cancel it, yes? That was the dealing?

immi: That is right...that is correct. Because the works was....they...the two most important works they could cause legal problems.

Nina: Mmmm....would you like to stage this exhibition somewhere else?

immi: I would like to stage it, yes.

Nina: Even if its going to affect ...you...and create certain problems?

immi: Well...perhaps it will affect, perhaps not affect. Nobody knows, and I...but I understand the gallerist was very cautious.

00:27:03

Nina: Mmm...How difficult for you is to find a concept for your work or exhibitions?

immi: No, its not difficult to have the...the idea it comes.

Nina: So it's no problem, just head full of ideas.....

immi: There is many ideas, yes. Its I think...maybe the problem to choose the right idea, because many idea have a kind of ....they are superficial ideas, in fact, so its difficult to choose, to get to the more interesting ideas....

Nina: You participated in The Exhausted Body exhibition in Taiwan....

immi: Yes....

Nina: How you think this can affect your being, as an artist, participating in such exhibitions, and did it actually affect you in any way?

immi: I don't think it did. I think maybe because Taiwan is so far away. I think maybe it would be good idea when exhibition in Taiwan, to go to Taiwan and talk to gallerist, and so on. Yes, but at that time I could not do this...

Nina: Did you ever use the catalogue to...to go to some gallerist and say listen, I've been exhibiting in this exhibition in Taiwan, and somewhere else and somewhere else...?

immi: Yes I showed the catalogue to one of the people, yes.

Nina: So did it help?

immi: ...its make people interested, yes. They say "Oh, Yes!"

Nina: So it's kind of justifying it...

immi: Yes...so OK...when you do some more thing, you tell me, you know.

Nina: OK. Erm...do you think I forgot some question to ask you?

I know there might be a question you was expecting me to ask you.

immi: No, I'm not...I'm not expecting any question, because I know the question you choose very carefully for er....

Nina: So you are the only one artist, out of 22 artists who have been interviewed, who do not disclose his identity. Why is it so?

immi: I...I like to control my own identity, I think.

Nina: Why?

immi: When you say you like to make video, I decide even if you make video, I am wearing mask, or wearing concealment ... even if this is the case....mmm....I am not in control of my identity.

Nina: Why is it so important to keep your identity?

immi: Well....I think at the moment I would just like to have the possibility to choose....

Nina: mmm....so do you think its affecting the artist so much, if you have a different identity?

immi: I don't know, but I don't think at the moment that my identity has to be for the public....around...

Nina: You think you are going to open your identity later on?

immi: Who knows.

Nina: Thank you immi!

Ends 00:30:52

### Questionnaire sample

[Q 1] Your name: Allan Jenkins

[Q 2] Date: 7/12/06

[Q 3] Present location: London

[Q 4] Any nicknames: Al & Mountain Man

[Q 4/1] (If yes) Since when do you use it? Since I was born for Al & Mountain man since university

[Q 4/2] How and why did you choose the nickname? Others chose it, Mountain as I was hairy & wild

[Q 4/3] Do you use it to sign your art work (alone or with you original name or only nickname)? No

[Q 4/4] Between close friends and family? No

[Q 5] Age: 37

[Q 6] Country of birth: Wales

[Q 7] Nationality: British

[Q 8] Current residence: London

[Q 9] Art Education (title of the course, institution, degree received): BA Honours UEL

[Q 9/1] If no education in arts received please indicate how you obtained your art skills

[Q 10] Did you always practice as an artist or you did have another jobs? All sorts

[Q 10/1] (If yes) what type and for how long did you practice? Retail, cocktail mixer , interpreter, builder, furniture maker, kitchen helper, waiter, tour guide, barman, painter/decorator, teacher, model, metal worker assistant, wedding photographer, fashion photographer, family portrait photographer, etc

I practiced these jobs to make ends meet and am still practicing some of them, but only the photographic ones now!

[Q 11] Employment status: FINE ART PHOTOGRAPHER/ Commercial photographer

[Q 12] Do you have any relatives practicing an artistic career? No

[Q 13] Parents' occupation: Restaurateurs

[Q 14] Are your friends and family supporting you in your chosen career? No

[Q 15] Do they financially support you? No

[Q 15/1] If yes do/did you need to return the money?

[Q 16] Do you think a career as an artist can disturb one's private life? (E.g. marriage, family etc.) Maybe

[Q 16/1] (If yes)Why? It's very intense and demands a lot of focus and dedication.

[Q 17] When did you have your first exhibition/ display? When I was 10 years old, a display at my school of a large ladybird drawing.

[Q 17/1] Were you satisfied with the outcome/ feedback? Totally fulfilled, proud and elated.

[Q 17/2] What would you do differently now if you were there again with the experience you have now? Try to avoid some awkward time waiting people, but generally I've always tried my best, so would do the same.

[Q 18] Did you work with any sponsors? If yes, how would you describe this experience? Yes, always a good idea if you can get people to believe in the work.

[Q 18/1] What do you think was their benefit in supporting your work? Emotional and financial.

[Q 19] What themes, genres, subjects do you like to use in your own artwork and why? (E.g. politics, spirituality, body, sex, death, still life, landscapes) Love, sensuality, intimacy, emotion, texture, nature, organic, earthy, finely tuned detail, perfect imperfection.. Because instinctively I'm drawn to these subjects, it's a deep visceral connection and a natural urge, I am drawn to practice this through art as a therapy for my soul. It feeds me and builds my work simultaneously.

[Q 20] What materials and techniques do you mostly use in your own works? Why do you choose specifically these materials? Large format cameras and hand-made Victorian printing techniques. Because It's what I know and understand, but also because it works for this particular subject-matter. It has a balance, and it's all about finding a formula that works. So eventually the medium flows and becomes secondary.

[Q 21] How do/did you think you will maintain your income after you complete your education as an artist?

I always knew and am convinced that I will do ok, because of my attitude; Success is all about attitude and flexibility.

[Q 22] What is the minimum average annual income that you would like to obtain as an artist?

£30.000 minimum per annum, but it must increase as you get more successful.

[Q 23] What is your annual expenditure per year? Couldn't say

[Q 24] Did you have any information on arts management or self-management as an artist, before taking the post-graduate course? If yes what information did you receive?

All my experience in Arts management is self-taught; they call it the School of Hard Knocks.

Cheers! And remember its good to gather information, but this information will keep evolving and changing, as an artist matures and learns about him/or herself, and that's the biggest challenge, to evolve with it, and not to follow fashion or trends, as those artists are products of marketing and A true artist is one that digs deeper to express himself, not copy other to sell art, not follow fashion to fit in, not follow trends to make more money, that's not Art, that's total business skill. And although one has to make a living, the best thing to do, is have separate incomes from commercial jobs and keep ones art sacred, honest, untouched and uncompromised, it will be more respected in the long term and have more durability, credibility and stability. Also, a self-fulfilment that remind us of why we were actually drawn to it in the first place.

### Questionnaire analysis sample

[Q12] Do you have any relatives practicing an artistic career?

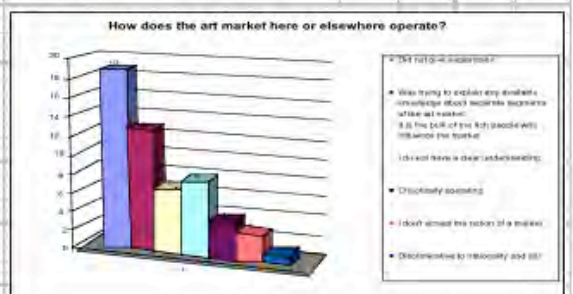
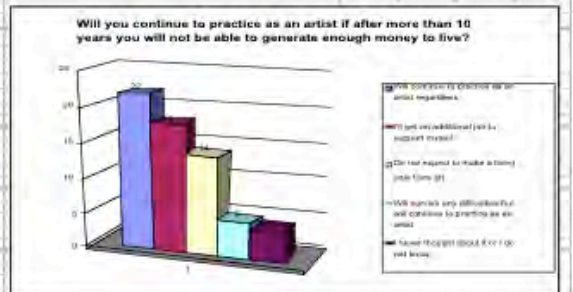
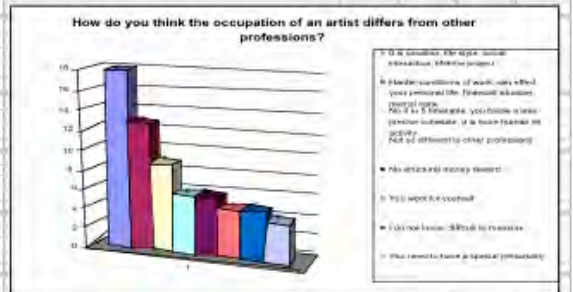
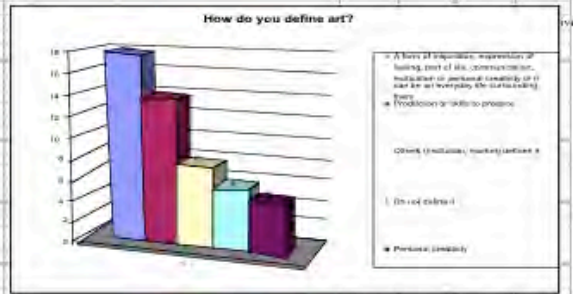
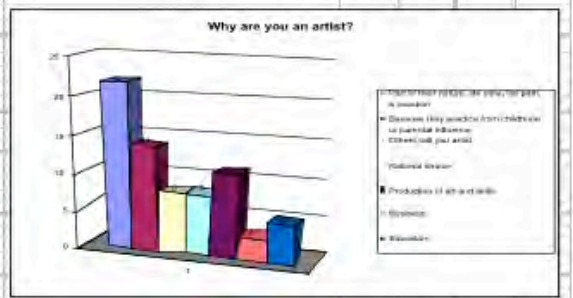
**Response from 22 artists: YES -15, NO- 9 (few artists gave both answers)**



# Interview analysis bar chart sample

Interview analysis of 22 artists: 12 MFA graduate students and 10 mid-career and established

Multiple responses by each artist identified.



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