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**Citation** (please note it is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from this work)

**Fillis, IR, Lehman, K and Wickham, M (2018) Exploring Supply Side Network Interactions in the Visual Art Production Process. Poetics, 69. pp. 57-69. ISSN 0304-422X**

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## **Exploring Supply Side Network Interactions in the Visual Art Production Process**

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Word Count: 10 235

## **Abstract**

This paper presents an analysis of the supply-side of the arts market with a focus on how the actors therein interact as a network in the art production process. Through the adoption of a qualitative semi-structured interview methodology, the paper provides insight into how professional and established visual artists (in conjunction with third-party support) conceptualise, produce and distribute their art works in the art market. Results indicate that the art product and the art production process is reliant on a range of mutually beneficial and reciprocal interactions that serve as bases for value creation in the art market. The paper concludes with a range of research opportunities for both academics and practitioners in the arts marketing context.

## **Author Biographies**

Dr Kim Lehman is Director of the Centre for Cultural Value at the University of Tasmania. His research interests focus on the arts and cultural sectors, with streams investigating marketing, development, management, and cultural tourism issues. He leads a number of research projects as part of this focus, and has published and presented his research internationally.

Dr Mark Wickham is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Tasmania, teaching introductory management and business ethics units. His research interests include social enterprise strategy and corporate social responsibility.

Prof Ian Fillis at the Liverpool Business School. He a leading entrepreneurial small business researcher with other research interests in creativity, arts marketing and consumer research. He has built an extensive international research network, extending to Europe, North America and Australia where he is currently engaged in a number of funded research projects on arts and entrepreneurial marketing.

# **Exploring Supply-Side Network Interactions in the Visual Art Production Process**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Arts marketing emerged as an important sub-field of the marketing discipline in the 1990s (see Baker & Falkner, 1991; O'Reilly, 2011; O'Reilly & Kerrigan, 2010; Rentschler, 2002; Shin, Lee & Lee, 2014). Despite a quarter of a century of empirical and conceptual work, the nature of the 'art as product' and the opaque nature of value creation in the art production process remain points of debate in the marketing literature (Fillis, 2006; Lehman, Wickham & Fillis, 2016; Oberlin & Gieryn, 2015) and the art world generally (Robertson, 2016; Thompson, 2008; Thompson, 2014; Timms, 2004). The marketing literature does not present a detailed conceptualisation the art production process, nor any specific guidance as to how artwork generates its market value; in particular, it has difficulty addressing circumstances where product development is not directly linked to consumer demand (Kubacki & Croft, 2011; O'Reilly, 2005). Contrary to the traditional marketing paradigm, where producers seek to understand target consumer needs and produce goods/services to satisfy them accordingly, the opposite appears the case in the arts context; here an output is created to satisfy the artists' intrinsic needs, and then is subsequently presented to the art market for consumption (Shin, Lee & Lee, 2014). Similarly, the art world often rejects the materialistic association of the 'product' concept as applied to their creative output, and consumer demand does not generally represent the primary driving force behind art and other cultural-based production (Fillis, 2011; Kubacki & Croft, 2011; Lehman & Wickham, 2014).

Whilst there is considerable product-related research in the arts marketing field (e.g., Bradshaw, 2010; Brown, 2015; Muñiz, Norris & Fine, 2014; Rodner & Kerrigan, 2014), the theoretical debate around 'art as a product' and 'art production' has generally stalled -

particularly with regard to the mechanisms around how actors on the supply-side interact as a network to create works considered valuable in the art market (see Bain, 2005; Charters, 2006; Crossland & Smith, 2002; Jyrama & Ayvari, 2010; Klamer & Petrova, 2007). Certainly, extant arts marketing research has explored art production and value creation processes from a whole-of-market perspective, but this has tended to focus on the identification of the various actors in the process and the sequential roles they perform in the art market (see Botti, 2000, Boorsma, 2006; Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016; Edelmann & Vaisey, 2014; Preece & Kerrigan, 2015). To advance our theoretical understanding of the ‘art product’, the ‘art production’ process (and their relationship to market value generation), therefore, this paper seeks to explore the manner in which the supply-side actors interact as a network in the art production process. In order to address this, we discuss the literature as it relates to the nature of the actors in the art production process as well as the (nominal) interactions that occur between them. In doing so, this paper seeks to respond to calls for more robust arts marketing theories (see Fillis, 2011; Lehman & Wickham, 2014) and for more empirical research to inform marketing theory in terms of the components of the art market network that are the bases of art production and value creation in the sector (Keuschnigg, 2015; Lehman & Wickham, 2014; Preece, Kerrigan & O’Reilly, 2016).

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The arts marketing literature generally identifies the art production process as a system of activities that concerns both the supply and consumption sides of the art market (see Alexander & Bowler, 2014; Giuffre, 2009; Koppman, 2014; Pouly, 2016; Rodner & Thomson, 2013; Velthuis, 2007). Jyrama and Ayvari (2010), for example, proposed a view of the art and culture market as having a network structure, consisting of various networks of participating actors who share relationships with each other. Actors are classified as either ‘businesses’ (e.g.,

galleries, consumers) or ‘institutional’ (e.g., museums and art schools), with markets hierarchically structured by reputation and status (Jyrama & Ayvari, 2010). Velthuis (2007, p. 7) agreed, stating that: “The art market is characterised by a dense network of intimate, long-term relationships between artists, collectors, and their intermediaries”. Rodner and Thomson (2013) similarly conceptualised it as being a ‘mechanical network’ (or ‘art machine’), consisting of art professionals and institutions. Each component of the mechanical network plays an essential (and at times overlapping) role: arts managers use business tactics to bring artwork and audiences together; critics and aestheticians justify the artwork within its current cultural and social context; government, business and philanthropy provide essential funding and a platform for wider dissemination (Rodner & Thomson, 2013). The collaborative nature of the interrelationships indicates that the perceptions of quality (and the potential for artists to be considered ‘successful’) is collectively constructed by key stakeholders in the art world (Martin, 2007). Interrelationships are also significant in Zorloni’s (2005) ‘systems view of the art market’ which describes the pricing and value of works and involves the following criteria: the significance of the artist’s brand, technical aspects of the works, degree of international competition, level of domestic cultural infrastructure, and the relative power of the respective dealer. For Curioni, Forti and Leone (2015, p. 56), the global art system (as they coined it) is a place where:

Economic/market potentials and critical/philosophic evaluations coexist as the customer’s ‘tastes’ interact with a moving, persuasive, hierarchical and complex regime enacted by commercial and non-commercial gatekeepers who legitimise the traded works as ‘art’ works.

Rodner and Thomson’s (2013) ‘art machine’ model presents the art market as consisting of components that purposely benefit from both the symbolic and financial value created by the mechanisms that tie the different elements together. In a study using Damien Hirst as a case, Preece, Kerrigan and O’Reilly (2016) proposed a visual art value framework that included a

value process and a range of value elements that results in the creation of value. They identified all the components of the art market and the process by which art products are legitimised and were critical of the emphasis on traditional marketing paradigms (e.g., the notion of target consumers, the satisfaction of consumer needs, etc.) as sources of value creation. The concentration on art production as a system, or a network, stems from a research paradigm that is focused on what constitutes 'value creation' and 'value co-creation', and the respective roles of art producers and consumers therein.

### *2.1 Identifying the supply-side art market actors*

Despite the concentration on the systems/networks view of art production, a common theme evident in art and culture literature is the identification and aggregation of 'groups of actors' that operate cooperatively in the sector. Hirschman (1983), for example, identified three actors to which a creative producer may be oriented towards the 'public at large' (i.e., the primary orientation for commercialised producers), 'peers and industry professionals', and 'the artist themselves'. Hirschman (1983) further considered the literature acknowledging the influence of network activities in the art production process; the role of a gallery owner, for example, is considered with respect to their interpretation and mediation of converting art into a product for consumption (Hirschman, 1983). Solomon's (1988) interpretation of art production referred to the interrelated processes of creation, manufacture, marketing, distribution, exhibiting and consumption. Solomon (1988, p. 331) demarcated the production system into three distinct parts:

A creative subsystem responsible for generating new symbols/products...a managerial subsystem responsible for selecting, making tangible, mass producing and managing the distribution of new symbols/products and...a communications subsystem responsible for giving meaning to the new product and providing it with a set of attributes which are communicated to consumers.

These subsystems can be seen as groups of actors interacting in a production process. Similarly, Botti (2000) suggested that art and culture production activities can, and indeed, needs to be grouped together to make sense of how the sector operates. In her article, Botti (2000) identified four distinct groups of actors: ‘the artist’, ‘champions’, ‘experts’ and ‘consumers’, who in concert produce, legitimate, distribute and finally consume the art product. Venkatesh and Meamber (2006) also identified clusters of actors that actively participate as an art production system, namely: ‘producers’ (i.e., designers, artists, etc.), ‘cultural intermediaries’ (i.e., individuals and organisations that are concerned with the communication and distribution of the art product to consumers), and ‘consumers’ (i.e., the group transforms art products into objects of meaningful consumption and experiences). Importantly, Venkatesh and Meamber (2006) suggest that these three areas do not operate autonomously, in that marketing, as a process and an institution act both as context and a facilitating framework for art production. Similarly, the subset of the distribution of art products is not separate to the making of an art product. As Meyer and Evan (1998, p. 277) noted: “The gallery owner therefore assumes the part of interpreter and mediator in the process of turning art into a product”. Overall, it can be seen that the market-wide research discussed here, by definition, concerns both the supply and consumption sides of the art market. What is apparent in the arts marketing literature is that the groups of actors that engage with each other in the art production process (particularly on the supply side) can be identified as per the descriptions in Table 1.

In sum, the extant modelling of the art market presents a systematic flow of information, services, raw materials and capital, etc. between actors, but does little to explain the complex patterns of interdependencies occurring between the groups of actors identified in Table 1 (e.g., Curioni, Forti & Leone, 2015; Preece, Kerrigan & O’Reilly, 2016; Rodner & Thomson, 2013;

**Table 1. Groups of Supply-Side Actors Involved in the Art Market**

| <b>Groups of Actors</b>  | <b>Description</b>  |
|--------------------------|---|
| <b>Conceptualisation</b> | Includes all actors that are involved in assisting the artist(s) in researching, formulating, and developing/expanding an art concept. It includes the artist themselves as well as (but not limited to): family, friends, peers, and any person involved in the intellectual and creative process upon which their art work is formulated.           |
| <b>Production</b>        | Includes all actors that play a role in the assembly or construction of an art work. This group includes individuals that provide physical assistance in the construction, fabrication and/or production of an art work. It also includes individuals that are called upon for their expertise or experience in using specific technologies or media. |
| <b>Distribution</b>      | Includes all actors involved in the distribution and marketing communication of the art work (e.g.: transport, logistics, commercial galleries, public institutions etc.).  |

Venkatesh & Meamber, 2006). There is an opportunity, therefore, to conduct a finer-grained analysis of how the actors in this part of the art market operate as an interdependent network, which will in turn provide a more robust framework for understanding ‘art as product’, the underlying art production process, and what constitutes supply-side bases for value creation (see calls by Fillis, 2011; Kerrigan, O’Reilly & vom Lehn, 2009; Lehman, Wickham & Fillis, 2016; Preece, Kerrigan & O’Reilly, 2016). We posit that the generation of a finer-grained understanding of the supply-side and how it operates as an interdependent network of interactions will provide a basis for future examinations of how consumer-side interactions might similarly add to an art product. Consequently, this paper seeks to address the specific research question: *How do supply-side actors interact as an interdependent network in the art production process?*

### **3. METHOD**

In order to address this research question, this study comprised of a series of semi-structured interviews with sixteen professional visual artists (as defined by Lena & Lindermann, 2014) identified from a list prepared by an expert panel (i.e., a commercial gallery director, a professor of art, and curator from an art museum). In order to contribute meaningfully to the

study, the panel were instructed to identify respondents that possessed *ad minima*: (a) a post-graduate qualification in a Fine Arts discipline, (b) have an extensive exhibition history or significant public commission record, (c) have their works held by major public institutions, and/or (d) have commercial gallery representation. Artists thus defined align with the ‘established’ stage of a visual artist’s career (Lehman & Wickham, 2014; Throsby & Peteskaya, 2017). As Lehman and Wickham (2014, p.18) note:

During the ‘established’ stage, visual artists interact with multiple target markets whose interest has manifest into commercial demand for their positively differentiated output. During this stage, visual artists face more than just ‘niche market’ demand, and demonstrate a complex interaction with various substantial target market segments (through an intermediary distribution channels such as commercial galleries and/or the professional arts community).

Our rationale for the *ad minima* criteria were four-fold: firstly, visual artists possessing a post-graduate qualification possess an advanced theoretical and practical understanding of the skills and professional practices necessary to develop a sustainable career in the arts sector (see Elkins, 2009). Secondly, the respondents have developed relationships with a range of suppliers and intermediaries and were in a position to reflect on the extent to these relationships influenced their production processes. Thirdly, as the respondents have been exposed to commercial demand for their production, they were in a position to reflect on the extent to which commercial demand has influenced their production decisions. Lastly, in order to gain meaningful insight about the value of marketing theory in the arts context, it is incumbent on researchers to gain access to the perceptions of the people that are often simultaneously representing the product, producer and brand (Kubacki & Croft, 2011). The demographic characteristics of the respondents recruited and interviewed in this study (see Appendix A) aligned closely with the national population of establish visual artists in Australia according to the most recent economic study of professional artists in the country (see Throsby & Peteskaya, 2017). In particular, the sample respondents in our study included nine female and seven male

visual artists, which aligns with the national gender-split of 54 percent females and 46 per cent males. Similarly, 12 of the respondents were located in capital cities and four were located in regional towns, which aligns with the national split of 75 per cent in major centres and 25 per cent in regional centres. In terms of education level achieved, 12 respondents qualified with a PhD and four with a Masters of Fine Arts, which aligns with 75 per cent of the national population (NB: Throsby & Peteskaya (2017) estimate that the national population of practising professional visual artists in the 'established' stage of their career in Australia is approximately 3,200).

The semi-structured interview questions posed to the respondents were based on the extant literature pertaining to the relationships between the groups of actors identified in Table 1, but were framed in an open-ended manner to allow the respondents sufficient latitude for introspection and open reporting of: (a) their motivations for art production, (b) their art production decision-making processes, and (c) the nature and influence of interactions they have with other supply-side actors in the arts market. The interview questions assisted in the aggregation and analysis of the data so that a supply-side model of the art production network could be explored. This method of primary data collection allowed the participants to tell their own story, and facilitated direct access to their interaction with others, as well as their perceptions of how this aligned with their career (see Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; O'Reilly, 2005). Each of the primary interviews were between 45 and 90 minutes in duration, and the transcripts were subject to a rigorous content analysis process that followed the protocols suggested by Finn, Elliott-White and Walton (2000), Hodson (1999) and Neumann (2003). During Stage One of the content analysis, the aims and objectives of the research were identified, and the first-round coding rules were developed; this research used the literature review as a guide to initially organise the data by the variables listed in Table 2. In Stage Two,

all of the interview transcripts were converted into MS Word® format and entered into an NVIVO database codified in accordance with Table 2. Bazeley and Jackson (2103) and Kaefer, Roper and Sinha (2015) note that computer software programs, such as NVIVO, are of significant value in qualitative analysis and any subsequent theory building.

**Table 2: First-Round Coding Variables and Definitions**

| <b>Node</b>  | <b>Coding Rules</b>   |
|--|---|
| <b>Intrinsic Motivation/Characteristics of the Artist</b>  | This node captured any data concerning the artists' motivations, goals, agenda, schema etc. that underpin their planned production outputs.   |
| <b>Influence of External Demand on Artists' Production</b> | This node captured data relating to intermediary or consumer needs and wants that directly affected or indirectly influenced the artist's motivations, goals, agenda, schema etc.   |
| <b>Interactions with the Arts Market Supply Chain</b>      | This node captured data relating to the extent to which the needs/wants/capabilities of the actors in the arts market context directly affected or indirectly influenced the artist's motivations, goals, agenda, schema etc. |

In Stage Three, the coded data were interrogated to detect any significant themes that emerged in terms of the networked interactions between the groups of supply-side actors as it related to the art production process; the emergent themes detected in the analysis formed the basis for establishing the second-round of data coding categories. At regular intervals during this stage, inter-coder reliability checks were taken to ensure that the data were coded consistently with the coding rules set out in Table 2. The inter-coder reliability checking process for this research was based on the two-stage process recommended by Compton, Love and Sell (2012): firstly, the researchers developed and pre-tested the coding rules against a sample of ten interview responses. Secondly, the researchers developed an agreement as to how ambiguous data were to be handled (i.e., instances where data could either be coded in to more than one code, or where the data did not readily fit into an existing code). In order to generate the necessary theoretical relationships, memos were maintained about the data, the coding categories, and the relationships between them as they emerged (Wilson, 1985). NVIVO has a facility for the

creation and retention of memos for consideration and analysis. Utilising the memo capability within the NVIVO package, memo reports were generated by the software; from these reports, the trends and emerging themes were identified. Appendix B provides a summary of how the data were interrogated and how the validity of the relationships between the categories was verified through the memo analysis process. The themes emanating from the memos form the basis of the results section that follows.

#### **4. RESULTS**

Firstly, the results of our investigation provided additional support for the notion that the supply-side of the art market can be conceptualised as a network comprising three specific groups of actors identified in the extant literature; that is, the art product/production process is comprised of: a group of actors involved in art conceptualisation (e.g., peers, mentors, studio assistants, etc.); a group of actors involved in supporting the art production process (e.g., suppliers, production facilities, technicians, etc.); and a group of actors involved in supporting artwork distribution (e.g., gallerists, curators, delivery agents etc.). Crucially, the data also identified that there is a range of elements utilised by each group; that is, there are a range of activities, skills and resources particular to each of the three groups of actors that were central to how and why they interacted. A list of the sets of elements utilised by each group is provided in Table 3.

In terms of the conceptualisation set, the respondents reported that a range of elements (e.g., as mentors, peers, research and knowledge bases) were involved in the conceptual facet of their practice. These elements most notably had roles in idea inspiration and generation, concept

**Table 3: Sets of Elements in the Art Making Process**

| <b>Conceptualisation Set: Activities, Skills &amp; Resources</b> |
|--|
| Artist's own Motivations   |
| Artist's own Research  |
| Access to and Use of 'Critical Friend' Groups                    |
| Access to and Use of Mentors and Knowledge Bases                 |
| <b>Production Set: Activities, Skills &amp; Resources</b>        |
| Technical Advice and Assistance                                  |
| Supply of Raw Materials  |
| Legitimisation and Quality Control                               |
| Production Facilities and Outsources                             |
| <b>Distribution Set: Activities, Skills &amp; Resources</b>      |
| Exhibition and Event Management                                  |
| Access to Public and Commercial Art Markets                      |
| Logistics, e.g., Insurance Transportation                        |
| Marketing and Promotion  |

testing and rigour, and critical responses and feedback:

I work right across with many teams of people, conceptually, practically, experienced knowledge I need to access, to make something. Then when the exhibition is on, I'll try and get people in to actually look at the show and discuss the exhibition again, because then you would hope that that knowledge of work then catapults you in to the next one (Interviewee 9).

... the conceptual network of mine is to do with a whole lot of research, and a lot of things that are sort of difficult to pin down. It may be conversations with people. It may be a film I see, something that I read, an exhibition I go to. ... then the idea gels in a way that is often unexpected. (Interviewee 6).

Similarly, respondents also reported significant interdependencies between various elements within the distribution and production groups. Notably, the production group provided technical and production process advice that helped overcome challenges and 'shaped' the art product in some way:

There's only so much knowledge as an artist that you can contain within your making process, and there's also so much knowledge that you can afford to understand (Interviewee 1).

There's a lot of experimentation into way things at this point in time can be produced and the kind of results you can get and trying to achieve... there's restrictions on that depending on material and scale and the machinery and all those sorts of thing... and you're restricted by location (Interviewee 10).

Overall, the data demonstrated the support role that the production group play in the art production process and have a significant (if partial) impact in the physical characteristics of the final art product. This set of activities, skills and resources (as well as the interactions with other groups of actors) has received scant attention in the literature, but it is apparent that their input is critical to understanding 'art as product'. In terms of the distribution set of elements, the respondents frequently noted logistics as a key element in the production of their art product:

We all use the same transport companies, because there's like a few of them, and they all come and pick up from us and take things. And when... we were building our studio, so we're all using people that we've worked with in the industry before... (Interviewee 14).

This notion of interactions within the broader network of groups was a common thread running through the data:

I do have a whole series of connections right across the country and to an extension globally. Certainly nationally, and to an extension globally. But yes, I have wide network of people, and I use that as part of the marketing of it. I'd be strategic about it (Interviewee 9).

In this way, the data suggests that the constituent parts of the art product are impacted by interactions between the three groups of actors identified in Table 1 via the sets of elements. Each of these will be discussed in turn in the following sections. (NB: It is important to note that we do not suggest that the three groups of actors carry equal weight in the art production process; we do suggest, however, that the physical characteristics of a given art product will be a function of the interactions that each make in the process).

#### *4.1 Conceptual-Production Interactions*

The data analysis revealed four distinct themes relating to the role of conceptualisation-production interactions in the creation of arts products: (1) the dyadic relationship between the artists and actors in the production group (i.e., those offering technical support to the production process); (2) collaboration; (3) inspiration and knowledge; and (4) physical production capacity.

##### *4.1.1 The dyadic relationship between the artists and actors in the production group*

In terms of the dyadic relationship between the artists and actors in the production group, respondents consistently reported that the final form of the art product was necessarily influenced by those providing technical and production support in the process:

There's a continuum I think between the idea and its production and they play into each other all the time. So, a technical problem might generate a new idea, a new idea might challenge the technology, move it forward (Interviewee 7).

...you can't separate them. You can't not think about the making...so they are one and the same. And you can talk about them as different, but when I approach a work it's always from a technical point of view, but it's also about how that mark or that process is, actually resonates (Interviewee 5).

The data analysed in this study supports our contention that there is some level of inseparability between the artists' conceptual work and that of the technical support provided by those in the production group. Indeed, a number of respondents indicated that the technical support provided by those in the production group help them to overcome some of the bounded rationality issues that constrain their ability to create new and/or innovative pieces of work:

As required, I'll bring people in to help me build things, to help me design things, to work things out under my direction, that I don't have the knowledge or scope in making. There's only so much knowledge as an artist you can contain within your making process, and there's also so much knowledge that you can afford to understand (Interviewee 9).

They are like two hands locked together: so here is your concept, here is your manufacturing (Interviewee 8).

#### *4.1.2 Collaboration between actors in the conceptualisation and production groups*

In terms of the level of collaboration between actors in the conceptualisation group and those in the production group, respondents reported the importance of being able to outsource critical components of the art product to those with greater levels of skill or expertise:

There's another team there also of professional practitioners who may be good at casting in bronze, who may be good at taking the photograph that I need, who might be good at working a computerised design system that I need. I work with those people and direct them towards the end product. (Interviewee 9).

I have to subcontract it out because I don't have a welder's certificate or I don't have a boiler marker's certificate and it's going to go outside occupational health and safety (Interviewee 8).

Critically, none of the respondents perceived the outsourcing of specialist skills or expertise detracted from their 'ownership' of the art product; in fact, the data tended to support the notion that collaboration with actors outside of the conceptualisation group was an entirely acceptable practice in the art production process:

I know that for me being able to bounce ideas off people, and then the sort of technical aspects of actually making the work have been really important (Interviewee 4).

And then from a purely practical point of view I put together teams of people. And what I'll do is as I'm working towards an exhibition there'll come a point where I'll bring in about six or seven people and get them to discuss all of the work. Everybody's always open to talk about the good things, but I'll also talk about what they think is wrong with the work (Interviewee 9).

#### *4.1.3 The exchange of inspiration and knowledge*

In terms of the exchange of inspiration and knowledge between the actors in the conceptualisation group and those in the production group, respondents reported the

importance of being able to discuss the context and content of the art production, especially when it is scheduled for commercial exhibition or installation:

I mean in terms of ideas and idea generation, in terms of that kind of side of it, obviously, that's a very personal thing and I mean you're fed by peers, experiences and also exhibiting with other people and so you've got that collective kind of thing going on (Interviewee 11).

The relationship of the inspiration and knowledge sharing to the art product(s), therefore, is relevant to the contextualised meaning of any given piece (a) in relation to others pieces by the same artist in a given commercial exhibition or installation, (b) in relation to the space in which the piece(s) are to be exhibited or installed, and/or (c) in relation to other artists' work that is being exhibited or installed in the same space. In terms of the capacity constraints of actors in the conceptualisation group and those in the production group, respondents consistently reported that their art product was affected by the scarcity of resources. Common resource scarcity issues reported in this study related to the availability of desired component parts (particularly quality, size, and number constraints), available production outlets (e.g., the number and size of local/regional factories, the number and size of local/regional storage facilities, geographic isolation and the tyranny of distance, production capacity of local/regional machinery etc.):

When I first came down here (I'd been living in Spain for six years) I'd been working on huge great big canvases. The first thing that I realised when I came down here is I couldn't buy canvas in Hobart that was the same as the dimensions that I had been using in Spain. So, I had to make smaller paintings (Interviewee 2),

I do realise I'm living in the 21st century, not the 16th, so I don't think I need to hand make everything. I make the first and I enjoy the production thing of ringing someone and subcontracting, and I think that's come from larger sculptures where you simply physically can't do because of the scale, so things are subcontracted out (Interviewee 2).

Then there's restrictions on that depending on material and scale and the machinery and all those sorts of things, so then you're kind of restricted by that and you're

restricted by location in terms of living in, I suppose, Tasmania and having that bit of water between us, so there's issues there (Interviewee 11).

As such, it would appear that an art product can be characterised not only by the skills and abilities inherent to the actors in the conceptualisation and production groups, but also by the difficulties/resource scarcities associated with its creation.

#### *4.2 The Conceptual-Distribution Interactions*

The analysis revealed three distinct themes relating to the role of distribution interactions in the creation of arts products: (1) the dyadic relationship between the artists and members of the distribution group (e.g., commercial galleries); (2) the power dynamics in the relationships between the artist and the distribution group; and (3) the intermediary's reputation, and the extent to which it is relevant to the established artist's career needs.

##### *4.2.1 The dyadic relationship between artists and actors in the distribution group*

In terms of dyadic relationship that exists between the artists and members of the distribution group, respondents consistently reported that the art product is necessarily influenced by those providing distribution services. The data indicated that the actors with the greatest influence were representative of the art galleries (i.e., curators, gallerists etc.), whose role was to act as an interface between the artists and the viewing public:

I think galleries play a very important role in getting art out and connected to people who will otherwise not connect with it, or people who want to connect to it and they don't know how, and they assume it needs to be a shopping experience (Interviewee 15).

I'll also use the knowledge of the gallery director in the design of that exhibition. Quite open to that conversation (Interviewee 9).

In this way, the actors in the distribution group contribute to the characteristics of the art product by requesting or suggesting exhibition themes to the actors in the conceptualisation

group that either (a) directly or indirectly feed into the creativity process and thus the production of new pieces, and/or (b) enable the artist to present existing pieces in new or innovative ways. Indeed, it was not uncommon for the respondents to comment on the extent to which curators and gallerists sought to involve themselves in the idea generation and/or production process:

You even hear of curators, whether they're gallerists or not, but curators talking about collaborating with the artist in making the work which sounds quite challenging (Interviewee 7).

...I work quite closely with [redacted] who's the curator of our [redacted] show, and he'll often say, "Oh, I'd like to see something like blah blah blah", and maybe it's because we have a good relationship, but I'll just go, "Oh, yeah, I think I can do that". It's a different; it's a more cooperative and personal thing (Interviewee 1).

I often rely on the galleries [that show my work] for equipment (Interviewee 1).

#### *4.2.2 Power dynamics*

The power dynamics that exist between the artist and actors in the distribution group appeared to impact the art production process and art product in two main ways. Firstly, respondents reported to the extent to which their personal reputation and/or artwork was recognised and/or valued by the public impacted on the amount of control they possessed over the production of their art. When respondents reflected on the period of their career where the distribution group possessed significant power in the relationship, they reported having less control over their production decisions:

The art world is all about power. If you're 'hot' you've got the power. If you don't, you're not, you don't have the power (Interviewee 5).

[It's] a slow process because there is that building up of a relationship which generally takes quite a long time for you to understand what they're after and for them to understand who you are (Interviewee 10).

A couple of galleries have asked [me to create] smaller works, and I have done smaller works in the past for the wages. You even hear of curators, whether they're

gallerists or not, talking about collaborating with the artist in making the work which sounds quite challenging (Interviewee 1).

However, when respondents reflected on the period of their career where they now possessed power in the relationship, they reported perceptions of possessing greater (but not total) control over their art production decisions:

A dealer doesn't affect my ideas, and they've never interfered with my ideas (Interviewee 1).

Sometimes they've been a bit concerned about the scale, about how difficult that might be to sell. There's not much they can do about it (Interviewee 13).

When you know you're going to have a show in six months' time and they start working to that deadline and it gives a sort of finite frame around what the artistic discovery might be. So, while it's still my idea, it sets a limit on what I can do (Interviewee 6).

Secondly, respondents reported that the power possessed by the distribution group (in terms of its reputation and market influence) impacted how and where the artwork(s) might be presented to the art market for consumption. In particular, respondents reported the importance of the link that the distribution group provides between the conceptual group and the art market:

I think galleries play a very important role in getting art out and connected to people who will otherwise not connect with it, or people who want to connect to it and they don't know how (Interviewee 1).

In addition to this, respondents indicated the importance of the distribution group in effectively conveying the ideas and concepts of the artwork(s), both in terms of the exhibition space itself, and in relation to the other artwork(s) being exhibited there:

So, there's the exhibition, there's the conceptual element of the art work, and the story, the narrative that the artist is trying to tell, is incredibly important through that exhibition process (Interviewee 2).

You're thinking about the space and what it's like, how many works you're going to have, how it's going to fit into there, who else is showing, if it's a group show or whatever. All of those things to do with the site and how they link in with the ideas you're trying to communicate [is important] (Interviewee 1).

#### *4.2.3 Intermediary reputation*

In terms of the intermediary's reputation, and the extent to which it is relevant to the established artist's career needs, respondents reported a quite complex interaction; on the one hand, the respondents acknowledged that the intermediary's reputation imbued their art product(s) with legitimacy (concomitant with the intermediary's standing in the art community), which in turn impacted the work's value in the commercial art market. On the other hand, the respondents understood that their reputation as an artist also impacted on the intermediary's reputation in a symbiotic manner:

I think it does add value because I think people, again you have to step out of yourself but they go into an establishment and they see the work in there and they think 'oh gee this work must be quite good if it's in here' too (Interviewee 10).

Once a gallery has been around for over 20 years, they build a reputation. They become a solid sort of gallery (Interviewee 3).

It's not just this object on a wall with an image that you engage with, it's all associated with the reputation of that artist as well because you've bought something that's associated with a particular person and so on (Interviewee 6).

#### *4.3 The Production-Distribution Interactions*

The analysis revealed two distinct themes relating to the role of production-distribution interactions in the creation of arts products: (1) accessing the knowledge and information shared between actors in the production group and those in the distribution group; and (2) the capacity constraints of the available logistical support.

#### *4.3.1 Accessing knowledge and information in the network*

In terms of accessing the knowledge and information shared between actors in the production group and those in the distribution group, respondents reported significant synergistic benefits emanating from being aware of and/or gaining access to downstream distribution partners such as festival and event organisers, new production facilities and other networks of emerging artists:

Well there's my studio, and there's people that I trust as well that I bring into my studio, so it's usually your dealer, the people that are surrounding you, other artists, and usually people that you know have a connection to your work or your process of working that you bring in (Interviewee 13).

Even with a festival or an exhibition that you're going to have, it's curious to watch how that kind of ripples back into the production process (Interviewee 14).

The respondents reported that access to this knowledge and information had significant impacts on their capacity to access new ideas, new distribution channel actors, etc. and the generation of their subsequent art products.

#### *4.3.2 Capacity constraints*

In terms of the capacity constraints of the available logistical support, respondents reported that factors such as transportation capacity, storage space, timeliness, and handling costs were challenges and could have a significant impact on the art production process:

The realisation is that production thing, and it also connects with the distribution because you're thinking if you'd been commissioned for a show and it's somewhere you're thinking about the space and what it's like and how many works you're going to have and how it's going to fit into there, who else is showing if it's a group show or whatever. Or if it's a commission you're thinking about, all of those things to do with the site etc., how they link in with the ideas (Interviewee 6).

You can't get things in and out of a truck over two metres usually, or you have to start paying big money. You're aware of the kind of limitations of transport, and if you're sending things to museums in a different city you're aware of packing, and

you're aware of thing that affects my work. I usually design work that is modular, so [transport] but it doesn't affect the ideas at all (Interviewee 13).

Whilst the capacity constraints noted above often played a role in confining the art product's dimensions and exhibition locations (thereby affecting its accessibility to the viewing public), respondents also reported that how the available logistics services often provided them with quite critical quality control services that protected its structural integrity:

And in terms of the mounting, I have an excellent [support team]. I've been to the factory a few times and I've got an excellent rapport with one person in particular who inspects the work and makes sure that it's 100%, no flaws. The prints are great when they arrive and all those sorts of things. Because I'm obviously 100 kilometres away you need that to run smoothly (Interviewee 11).

#### *4.4 Summary*

Our focused investigation indicates that there are a range of supply-side network interactions that together imbue an art product with its physical characteristics and bases of value in the art market context (i.e., in addition to the conceptual and artistic skill of the artist(s) who created it). Table 4 presents a summary of the art market interactions presented above, and the manner in which they influenced/impacted the characteristics of their art products.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

This paper sought to offer a finer-grained analysis of how the supply-side actors in the art market interacted in the art production process. In terms of the extant literature, the results presented here confirmed that supply-side of the art market can indeed be grouped into the broad categories of actors as suggested by Botti (2000) and Venkatesh and Meamber (2006) (i.e., groups of actors that perform conceptualisation activities, production activities and distribution activities). In addition to this, this research also confirmed the veracity of defining

**Table 4: Interactions that Underpin the Creation of the Art Product**

| <b>(a) Conceptual-Production Interactions</b>   |
|---|
| <b>The art product is created through:</b>  |
| A dyadic relationship between conceptualisation and production actors   |
| The level of collaboration between the artist and actors in the production group  |
| An exchange of inspiration and knowledge between conceptualisation and production actors  |
| The physical capacity constraints of the conceptualisation and production actors  |
| <b>(b) Conceptual-Distribution Interactions</b>   |
| <b>The art product is created through:</b>  |
| A dyadic relationship between conceptual and distribution actors  |
| Power dynamics in the relationships between the artist and actors in the distribution group                                       |
| The extent to which the intermediary's reputation is relevant to the established artist's career needs                            |
| <b>(c) Production-Distribution Interactions</b>   |
| <b>The art product is created through:</b>  |
| Access to the knowledge and information shared between the actors in the production and distribution groups                       |
| The capacity constraints of the available logistical support (i.e., transportation capacity, storage space, timeliness, and cost) |

the structure of the art market as a network of actors (as posited in research by Jyrama & Ayvari, 2010; Marshall & Forrest, 2011; Rodner & Thomson, 2013; Velthuis, 2007), and supports the notion that the art product culminates from a range of collaborations and interdependent relationships within a network structure (see Curioni, Forti & Leone, 2015; Martin, 2007; Zorloni, 2005). In terms of the interactions between the actors in the conceptualisation-production groups, this research suggests that a given art product comprises more than just the talent/personal characteristics of the artist whose name it bears; its physical form necessarily includes the technical expertise and/or skills of actors in the conceptualisation group and/or that of other actors in the production group. Certainly, the technical skills of the artist are important in defining the art product (Marshall & Forrest, 2011), however we suggest that the skills of *all* those involved in the conceptualisation and production activities possess the capacity to impact an art product with its physical characteristics and imbue it with market value (which may be either positive or negative in nature, as the case may be). It is important

to note that this research also demonstrated the capacity for conceptualisation-production interactions that are more heavily weighted on production activities (e.g., negotiations concerning the size, the materials used etc. between a sculptor and the foundry that casts their final work) are also crucial to the quality and perceived value of the final art product. This raises questions about the (potentially arbitrary) boundaries drawn between ‘artist-inspired works’ and ‘commissioned pieces’ in terms of the status and impact these designations have on an art product’s perceived value in the market.

In terms of the interactions between the actors in the conceptualisation-distribution groups, this research suggests that the physical attributes and market value of an art product is partially results from the dyadic relationship between actors in the conceptualisation group and those in the distribution group (and the power dynamics at play between the actors therein). This supports Kottasz and Bennett’s (2013) suggestion that an established artist with a strong personal brand has greater capacity to control the outcomes of the interactions with distribution channel actors. In this study, the established artists reported an ability to influence decisions about where and how their artwork(s) are distributed and marketed by third-parties, and the power to specify which artwork(s) they want exhibited in a particular place. In addition to this, the established artists in this study also reported that their status (and that of their artwork) required them to carefully consider the manner of their participation in activities/exhibitions/associations with other artists and sponsors etc., especially if they perceived there was a risk that their participation could somehow negatively impact their work or reputation.

On a more complex note, the interaction between the reputations of the actors in both groups appeared to play a significant role (both negatively and positively) in the perceptions of

legitimacy, quality and market value of their art product. Respondents in this study reported that they chose gallery representation partially based on the reputation of the gallery itself, its managerial capabilities, and the other artists it represented. A number of authors have noted the legitimising and value-determining role of the art market (see Botti, 2000; Marshall & Forrest, 2011; Rodner & Thomson, 2013), however, the significance of the role of the networked interactions in this respect (most notably in terms of the power dynamics that exist between the artist and exhibition spaces) have not previously been explored in this level of detail. It is apparent that the physical exhibition of artwork(s) is linked to perceptions of its market value; that is, there is a relationship between the artist, the work created by the artist, and the space(s) within which that work has been exhibited/installed over time.

In terms of the interactions between the actors in the production-distribution groups, this research suggests that a given art product is imbued with its physical characteristics, albeit indirectly, by the capacity of the available logistics services to deliver the transportation requirements, storage space needs, and interactions with the various distribution channel members. These capacity limitations and constraints can influence the actors in the conceptualisation group (in terms of what they produce, how many they produce, and the size/structure/components of what they produce). It was noted however, that the suppliers of logistics services in the network were able to provide important quality control services for the artists that served to protect the physical integrity of the art product (and indirectly, the reputation of those involved in its production and exhibition). For example, respondents in this study reported that clear channels of communication and a mutual respect between actors in the production-distribution groups were vital for quality control purposes (especially in negotiations about what constituted 'essential supply chain services' in this regard). In addition to these benefits, the ability for the artists to access the knowledge and

information shared between actors in the production group and those in the distribution group increased their capacity to generate new ideas and access new networks in the art cultural sector.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

### *6.1 Implications for Theory and Practice*

The findings of this research provide additional support for the notion that the art product and art production process comprise (and can therefore be in-part defined by) a series of interdependent network activities that occur between three supply-side groups of actors: i.e., those that contribute to the conceptualisation of the art product, those supporting in the production process, and those providing distribution and marketing support. Whilst the various groups of actors have been identified and their roles described in the literature previously (e.g., Hirschman, 1983; Jyrama & Ayvari, 2010; Solomon, 1988; Rodner & Thomson, 2013; Zorloni, 2005), our approach combined the array of actors into three key groups, allowing the network interactions that occurred between them to be interrogated in finer detail. In doing so, we were able to identify specific sets of elements utilised by each of the three groups (i.e., their activities, skills and resources) and the manner in which the network interactions between them served to imbue the art product with its physical characteristics. By defining and providing a finer-grained understanding of the interactions that artists perceive as contributing to the art production process, we can better understand how these interactions underpin its market-based value (although this necessitates that similar work be conducted with regard to the consumption side on this matter). In addition to this, we feel that the interactions framework developed in this paper may also be transferrable to other cultural products and services research to explore the bases for their physical characteristics more fully (e.g., to what extent are cultural heritage products imbued with their physical characteristics via the manufacturers' interactions with suppliers, country-of-origin effects, intermediaries, final vendors, etc.).

In terms of implications for art practitioners, this paper provides a means by which actors in the art market can more accurately conceptualise their roles in the art production process, and the manner in which their interactions impact their art products with the physical characteristics (and bases of value) in the art market. This may be particularly useful in situations where an individual (or team) enacts multiple roles across the three categories and want to organise and demarcate responsibilities effectively (e.g., where an artist, or a team of artists, also preforms

the roles of suppliers, marketers and exhibitors). In terms of the conceptual/production interactions, the findings of this study emphasise the benefits of establishing relationships between artists and those that can assist with concept testing and idea refinement, the supply of materials and production techniques/infrastructure, and with quality control aspects of the art production process. Understanding the roles and functions that a network can perform in these regards will assist all of the actors in the part of the network plan and perform their duties more effectively and efficiently. In terms of conceptual/distribution interactions, the findings emphasise the need for the various actors to manage their reputation and market impact carefully, as it appears that the relative power dynamic that exists between the actors in this part of the network is critical to how the art production process can be influenced, and how the final artworks are exhibited and, in turn, perceived in the art market. In terms of production/distribution interactions, it is apparent that actors in the conceptual group have an opportunity to access a great deal of art market information in the form of the knowledge shared between the production and distribution groups. This implies that actors in the conceptual group need to consider increasing their ability to seek out the information that is generated between these two groups, and not rely solely on that generated by their direct interactions with them. By understanding the art product and art production process in these ways, we offer art practitioners a framework for making informed decisions about how they manage their supply-side relationships in the art market.

## *6.2 Opportunities for Future Research*

Given that this study confined its scope to visual artists, there is an opportunity to conduct similar research with other art-based disciplines (e.g., how do the interactions impact theatre, dance, musical performance etc. with its physical characteristics?). Similarly, as this research was conducted in Australia it would be useful to explore alternative perspectives in other geographic locations (e.g., the extent to which the groups of actors and/or the nature of the interactions are evident in Europe, North America, Asia etc.). Next, there is an opportunity to undertake an analysis of how the relative power dynamics that exist between the actors in the conceptual, production and distribution impact the nature of their interactions and the art market value that is generated therein. In addition to this, the findings as they relate to the interactions between the Production and Distribution groups described in this paper are

indirectly represented by our analysis of the primary data (i.e., our interviews were with the visual artists in the 'Conceptualisation' group only, and not with actors from the 'Production' and 'Distribution' groups directly), and research seeking direct evidence from these groups of actors would be valuable. An additional line of enquiry could also be an analysis of data elicited from artists at other stages of their career trajectory; as noted by Lehman and Wickham (2014), the marketing orientations and activities of artists vary considerably as they progress, and the interactions they rely upon in the creation of their art product will necessary vary accordingly.

Finally, this study considered only the supply side of the art market, aiming for a finer-grained analysis of the art production process from that perspective. As such, further research taking a consumption-side perspective on the art product (i.e., from the perspectives of audiences, critics, tourists etc.) would seem apropos and provide additional insight that would allow the co-creation of value issue to be explored more rigorously. In particular, it would be pertinent to explore the extent to which the supply-side interactions highlighted in this research are visible and/or important to actors on the consumption-side (and vice-versa, for example, how value is perceived in 'commissioned' versus 'artist-inspired' artworks). Similarly, it would be worthwhile to explore the circumstances under which the network interactions between the conceptualisation/production and conceptualisation/distribution actors provide a basis for perceptions of artistic value by consumption-side actors.

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### Appendix A: Summary of Respondents Interviewed

| Respondent No. | Residence  | Gender | Qualification. | Medium                 |
|----------------|------------|--------|----------------|------------------------|
| 1              | Canberra   | F      | PhD            | Video/installation     |
| 2              | Hobart     | M      | MFA            | Painting               |
| 3              | Hobart     | M      | MFA            | Painting               |
| 4              | Hobart     | F      | PhD            | Painting               |
| 5              | Hobart     | F      | PhD            | Photography/video      |
| 6              | Hobart     | F      | PhD            | Installation           |
| 7              | Hobart     | M      | PhD            | Video/installation     |
| 8              | Launceston | M      | PhD            | Sculpture              |
| 9              | Launceston | M      | PhD            | Sculpture              |
| 10             | Launceston | M      | MFA            | Photography            |
| 11             | Launceston | F      | MFA            | Photography            |
| 12             | Melbourne  | F      | PhD            | Photography            |
| 13             | Melbourne  | F      | PhD            | Sculpture/installation |
| 14             | Sydney     | M      | PhD            | Sculpture/installation |
| 15             | Sydney     | F      | PhD            | Sculpture/installation |
| 16             | Sydney     | F      | PhD            | Photography/video      |

## Appendix B: Processes for Data Interrogation

| Tactic  | Procedure   |
|---|---|
| <b>Noting patterns and themes</b>                 | When observing phenomena, gestalt psychology holds that people tend to perceive events in their entirety rather than their constituent parts. Therefore, as data relating to the art production process were interrogated using text-based search functions, recurring patterns and themes were noted in order to consolidate individual facets of the information. |
| <b>Seeking plausibility</b>                       | Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 246) suggest that drawing inferences "...often happens during analysis that a conclusion is plausible, 'makes good sense', 'fits' ... so plausibility, and intuition as the underlying basis for it, is [valuable]."   |
| <b>Clustering</b>                                 | Organising primary data in to clusters aids in its interpretation by grouping themes that have similar characteristics. In this research, the clustering of data culminated in the determination of interconnected themes, which themselves formed part of the analysis process.  |
| <b>Noting relationships between variables</b>     | Determining the nature of the relationship between the independent variable (i.e., 'art production') and the data relating to the systematic interactions evident by the actors in the arts market allowed the researchers to ascertain how these variables change directly, change inversely, or demonstrated no relationship at all.                              |
| <b>Finding intervening variables</b>              | An intervening variable is one that theoretically affects the observed phenomenon but cannot be observed directly. When variables in this inquiry seemed to be related but provided an unsatisfactory explanation, the data was interrogated/triangulated further for possible intervening variables.   |
| <b>Making conceptual or theoretical coherence</b> | Having gleaned evidence from the data that appeared to form converging patterns and identify relationships, theory was inducted from that evidence.   |