

**Assessing the notion of art as a product:  
entrepreneurial marketing insights from the visual arts**

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## **Abstract:**

**Purpose:** This paper assesses the notion of art as a product. We develop a detailed understanding of how established visual artists engage with the notion in their art making and market interactions, drawing insight from the longitudinal debate on the essence of art, including its connection with entrepreneurial marketing.

**Design/methodology/approach:** We use a conceptual framework involving artists' and other stakeholder' philosophical positions, artists' career stages, reputation (including branding), market associations, and the forms of value generated by artists and consumers to help shape our qualitative research design involving in-depth interviews with sixteen established Australian artists. NVivo software aided data analysis in order to improve theory building.

**Findings:** Market orientation, entrepreneurial market creation, co-creation, co-production activities and sharing value among interested stakeholders are important factors in viewing art as a commercial product. Sustainable value creation is also crucial. Key emergent themes were motivation to create, engagement with the market, and artists' attitudes towards art as a product. We identify a fluidity in the relationship between an artist and their art.

**Practical implications:** Established artists have made a conscious decision to engage, or otherwise with the marketplace. This research uncovers the merits of adopting a product approach in engaging with the market and artist centred creation which avoids marketplace interaction.

**Originality/value:** This research has the potential to contribute to policy decision making in the sector and in stimulating future comparative research. There are wider implications for the cultural and creative industries where entrepreneurial market creation can stimulate creativity and innovation.

**Keywords:** artist, product, market, entrepreneurship, branding, value

## **Introduction:**

There has been extensive discussion of the meaning and definition of art in non-business, philosophical contexts, including its symbolic attributes (e.g. Holbrook 1989; Barrere and Santagata 1999), but, at the same time, there has been a lack of consideration of the positioning of art as a product from small business and entrepreneurship perspectives, including entrepreneurial marketing (Briskman, 1980; Molotch, 1996; Drummond, 2006; Fillis, 2006; Hagtvedt and Patrick 2008; Fillis 2010; Lehman, Miles and Fillis 2014; Fillis, Lehman and Miles 2016). The aim of this paper is to assess the engagement by artists with the term ‘product’ in relation to their art. This then uncovers how the artist engages with the market in terms of developing their work and career. This will also help advance the debate so that interested stakeholders come to appreciate opposing views in shaping the future of the sector. We do this through the adoption of the entrepreneurial marketing lens. The challenge is that artists do not tend to categorise. Instead, they turn to their philosophical disposition towards the notion of art as a product. This paper contributes to understanding how visual art is viewed as a product by experienced visual artists who have considerable experience of marketplace engagement, market creation and entrepreneurial interventions in the visual art sector. We assess, through an understanding of artists’ conceptions of ‘product’, if, how and to what extent an entrepreneurial marketing approach to investigation is appropriate. More specifically: on the basis that the traditional/4 Ps marketing frameworks are deemed not entirely appropriate, we believe that entrepreneurial marketing is a ‘better’ representation of what artists do in terms of the marketing that they practice.

The notion of ‘product’ has evolved from being a tangible entity to now include ideas (Poetz & Schreier, 2012), experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) and co-creation between consumer and producer (Gronroos, 2012), and, therefore, not as a product category. Sociologically speaking,

art is viewed as a product of society (Hauser, 2011), in that it is shaped by natural, generational, historical and cultural factors. Certainly, any connection with the market is often superseded by the artist's own self orientation and focus on the art being created (Hirschman, 1983; Fillis, 2006). Another complicating factor is that there has been a resurgence of the product term within the arts and cultural sectors in recent years. This is due to the recognition that consumer needs are not necessarily the main driving force behind art and cultural production where creation comes from within the organisation (Walmsley, 2011). So, the relationship is difficult to assess, as is its individual components, but this should not deter why and how we go about understanding it.

### **Artists' engagement with the market:**

Visual artists exhibit a variety of attitudes towards the marketplace, with some shunning it, while others embrace it. Some feel that engagement in the market by artists, gallerists, collectors and investors evokes a sense of trading art as a commodity (Plattner 1998; Wagner and Wagner 2013; Gerlis 2016). Similarly, applying the term 'product' to the artwork is therefore unproblematic for some, while, for others, market engagement is the furthest thing from their mind as they focus on creating art for intrinsic reasons (Holden 2006). Recently graduated emerging artists, for example, have invested several years of their time studying art, but they have little or no insight into how to engage with the outside world (Røyseng, Mangset and Borgen 2007; Fillis, Lee and Fraser, 2015). There is a lack of intervention at art school in terms of providing insight into how the art market operates and how artist should price their work (Bauer, Viola and Strauss 2011). (Note, we use the term 'artist' in this paper to denote 'visual artist'.)

Connections can be identified between art and business concepts; for example, art's link with innovation can be likened to the product life cycle, (Day, 1981; Potts, 2007) where, artists as early adopters experiment with novel techniques and push the boundaries of what art actually is. Audiences as early adopters are also risk embracing, as are those curators, collectors and investors who see value in as yet unrecognised talent. We refer to the PLC concept in order to frame how artists' attitudes towards the product notion can change or evolve over time, rather than exist as a static entity. Product innovation is more common in the cultural industries, where art can be located, than is innovation in the economy as a whole (Handke, 2008). Insight from marketing theory (e.g. Bradshaw, 2010; O'Reilly, Rentschler & Kirchner, 2014), consumer behaviour (Müller-Stewens, Schlager, Häubl & Herrmann, 2017), market orientation versus market creation positions also make useful contributions to the debate (Narver & Slater, 1990). Any reference to art and the market necessitates thinking in some way about the product notion; for example a cultural economics approach tends to adopt market based language (Cameron, 2014). Kirchner and Ford (2014) advance thinking by providing alternatives to product-based interpretations through their critique of traditional versus entrepreneurial marketing perspectives on arts and culture. The former concerns the application of the 4Ps of the marketing mix approach (product, price, promotion, place). The latter involves alternative, creative, disruptive, out of the box approaches to re-imagining arts marketing through innovation, calculated risk-taking and proactiveness.

### **The value of the art product:**

Heightened understanding of these impacting factors enables those individuals, groups and organisations with an interest in the art world, including policymakers, to better appreciate artists' priorities. In Australia cultural and creative activity contributed A\$115.2 billion to the economy in 2017–2018, which accounted for 6.3% of Australia's gross domestic product

(GDP) in that 12-month period (Commonwealth of Australia 2020). Revenue generated in the Australian art market in 2021 via art galleries and museums, despite Covid-19 effects, is A\$1.6bn (Industry Statistics – Australia 2021). This can be compared to the wider UK arts and cultural industry which directly contributes £10.8billion to the economy annually through Gross Value Added, with turnover of around £3billion in artistic creation (CEBR 2019). In 2018, the global art market recorded sales of \$67.4 billion, with the USA having 44% of total sales, followed by the UK (21%) and China (19%) (Artlyst 2019). This collective economic impact via sales by value means that understanding the art as a product connection is crucial in setting out how interested stakeholders connect with artists and their work in order to sustain its effectiveness as both an economic good (Throsby 2003) and cultural entity (Crossick and Kaszynska 2014). We want to emphasise again here that we are not concerned specifically about categorization but rather, the reasons behind the artists' philosophical and practical positions towards art as a product.

### **The entrepreneurial marketing domain:**

Fillis (2005) synthesises its key elements by noting how the areas of commonality between entrepreneurship and marketing are contained within an entrepreneurial marketing approach which identifies the need for situational awareness within a heterogeneous firm environment (O'Donnell, 2004). This can be achieved through owner/manager competencies relating to experience, knowledge, communication and judgement (Carson et al., 1995). The operationalisation of entrepreneurial marketing relies on the proactive identification and exploitation of opportunities by adopting innovative approaches to risk taking, resource leveraging and value creation (Morris et al., 2002). Other important factors include the ability to network, self-belief, imagination, vision, judgement, creativity, ambition, intuition and flexibility (Hansen and Hills, 2004; Jones and Rowley, 2011).

### **The entrepreneurial marketing/art interface:**

We begin by appraising the existing entrepreneurial marketing literature and its interface with the art world and then focus on the entrepreneurial marketing/visual artist relationship. We then draw on the qualitative insight from our artist interviews in order to identify the influencing factors which impact on their perceptions of art as a product. Fillis (2011) highlights the origins of the adoption of the entrepreneurial marketing lens as a critical and creative approach to understanding contemporary, innovative arts marketing theory and practice. Chartrand (1990) identified the artist as a risk-taking entrepreneur, aligning with Fillis's notion of the artist as an owner/manager of a microbusiness. Flipping the lens, Fillis (2009; 2010b) assesses the usefulness of an artistic approach to understanding entrepreneurial marketing. This matches the way in which the owner/manager behaves in developing a personalised approach to marketing practice. This can also be viewed as an experimental approach to entrepreneurial marketing, with the entrepreneurial marketer is critically reimaged as an artist. The overall ethos contained in this paper is that creativity mirroring the philosophy and practice of the artist, is utilised in the development of entrepreneurial marketing in engaging with the chaotic and often fragmented marketplace. Spontaneity, rather than planned strategic engagement, often occurs.

There has been extensive discussion of the meaning and definition of art in non-business, philosophical contexts, including its symbolic attributes (e.g. Holbrook 1989; Barrere and Santagata 1999), but, at the same time, there has been limited consideration of the positioning of art as a product from small business and entrepreneurship perspectives, including entrepreneurial marketing (Briskman, 1980; Molotch, 1996; Drummond, 2006; Fillis, 2006; Hagtvedt and Patrick 2008; Fillis 2010a; Lehman, Miles and Fillis 2014; Fillis, Lehman and

Miles 2016). In terms of embedding entrepreneurial marketing into arts and cultural practices, Wise, Ozdemir and Fillis (2022) utilise an entrepreneurial marketing lens in order to understand urban development of arts and culture through production and consumption processes, where ‘product’ is central, for example through artist centred festivals and gallery activities. Fillis and Lehman (ahead of print) investigate how art in the form of cultural murals are produced and consumed as both socio-political objects and art tourism products. Here entrepreneurial arts marketing as part of the arts and cultural economy is central to their production and promotion. Additional insight is provided by Fillis, Lee and Fraser (2022) who examine how entrepreneurial interventions by an art institution can assist in emerging artist career development. They note that the reasons behind how and why artists produce their work often relates to their engagement with the marketplace or the pursuit of a more intrinsically created art product. Other entrepreneurial marketing related research in the arts includes Lee, Fraser and Fillis (2022) who assess how price-setting by emerging artists can be impacted by their entrepreneurial mindset but can also be shaped by inappropriate or unrealistic art product price setting due to the lack of engagement with the art market. Further evidence of arts-based entrepreneurial marketing practice is provided by Fillis and Lehman (2021) who investigate how the privately funded Museum of Old and New Art has become the second most visited destination on the island of Tasmania, Australia.

Lehman, Wickham and Fillis (2018) analyse the supply-side of the arts market, focusing on how the actors interact as a network in the art production process. They find that the art product and the art production process depends on a range of mutually beneficial and reciprocal interactions resulting in art market value creation. Wickham, Lehman and Fillis (2020) extend this thinking by assessing how an entrepreneurial perspective can assist in defining the art product through conceptualisation, production and distribution networks. Lehman, Miles and



Fillis (2014) focus on how entrepreneurial marketing has helped to develop the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) in Hobart, Tasmania. They demonstrate how formal methods of marketing are replaced by in owner/ manager constructed situational marketing.

### **Insight into art as a product from critical arts marketing research:**

In order to generate additional insight into the notion of art as a product, we evaluate the relevant literature from critical arts marketing which has successfully generated new theory relating to the production and consumption of art. This helps us to understand more about the art versus product relationship. Butler (2000) provides support for an alternative form of marketing in the arts by noting the limitations of a marketing mix approach and the merits of product-centred marketing. In fact he refers to artists as the ultimate manifestation of product orientation. The particular skills or competencies relating to the personality of the artist help shape creative marketing behaviours (Evrard, 1991).

Critical arts marketing research enables us to develop more relevant theory surrounding art as a product, moving away from the marketing mix approach which does not acknowledge the philosophical and practical positions being distinct from other sectors (Hirschman, 1983). This also enables us to adopt entrepreneurial marketing as a critical lens. Venkatesh and Meamber (2006), for example, locate art within the cultural creation process where it is then transformed as part of wider consumer culture where products are evaluated, used and disposed of. In Bradshaw's (2010) notes how marketing as art draws on how the art world can be used as a data source in informing how a more creative form of marketing in practice, where products are produced, can be achieved by mirroring the creative competencies of the artist. Art as marketing concerns the interrogation of, for example, the contents of visual art outputs in communicating critical messages about the marketplace and the wider economy. In effect, both

these positions relate to the adoption of the entrepreneurial marketing lens. Lehman and Wickham (2014, 665), in their construction of a visual artists' marketing trajectory model, note how:

Botti's (2000) investigation of arts consumption and artistic value compared a product-oriented and a customer-oriented approach to arts marketing that assumed there was a clear definition of 'product' and 'customer' in the arts and cultural sector.

We, however, contend that this is an over-simplification of what occurs in practice, and that the producer/consumer relationship is much more complex and product boundaries much less discrete than in other industry sectors.

### **Artists, brands and the product relationship:**

An artist's brand can manifest itself in a variety of product forms, with successful artists being viewed as brand managers who promote themselves as recognizable cultural products (Schroeder, 2005). This also relates to the notion of the artist as an owner/manager (Fillis, 2011). If the artist already has an established career, there are likely to be brand histories present (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001) and product narratives associated with the artist's aura or brand essence (Brown, Kozinets & Sherry, 2003). If the artist is represented by a gallery or art institution, the artist's work receives further validation via the co-branding relationship as recognition levels are raised (Washburn et al., 2000). Some artists at any stage of their career may instinctively view themselves as a brand in the marketplace while others will shy away from this, believing instead that the art itself is what matters (Shepherd, 2005; Fillis, 2006; Lehman & Wickham, 2014). Therefore, interactions with art can be much more complex than with everyday objects. It can be argued that artists create a product and then communicate it to consumers, since they represent both product and producer (Kubacki & Croft, 2004). If we are dealing with artists who have followed market orientation, then product terminology seems appropriate. Many artists produce copies of their work for purchase, improving its accessibility

and potentially making this a product for mass consumption. Lehman, Wickham and Fillis (2016) note how art and cultural activities being viewed as product, with their associated materiality and consumer demand, is contested in the arts and culture community (e.g. O'Reilly & Kerrigan, 2010; Muñiz, Norris & Fine, 2014). The art product is partly defined by the artist's identity, personality and career history (Preece and Kerrigan, 2015) which combine to influence how the art is 'produced, presented, consumed, positioned and valued in the market' (p. 1207). However, there are actually multiple stakeholder influences here, some controlled by the artists, with others outside their influence. The resultant impact on defining and shaping art as a product is due to collective action. Meyer and Even (1998) suggest that product-centred entrepreneurial creativity is involved. Here art becomes a traded good in the marketplace, with the artist assuming the part of an entrepreneurial innovator. Both Fillis (2004) and O'Reilly (2005), however, emphasise the role of the self and the resultant creativity in shaping the art. These differences in perspective can be summarised using the concept of 'drive' (Morgan, 1979) e.g. some artists engage in artistic creation due to their quest for intellectual stimulation or sensory gratification. Others may be driven by the market and financial reward.

Fillis (2002) notes how understanding the role that creativity plays in determining how the idea for a creative product is first identified, through to its commercial exploitation, can provide important lessons. Entrepreneurial marketers as artists can offer alternative, more appropriate, forms of marketing. The art product extends beyond the art itself in terms of its associated cultural value and creativity (Lee, Fraser and Fillis 2018; White et al. 2008). One of the main entrepreneurial objectives here relates to the identification of profitable risk-taking product opportunities which appeal to identifiable markets (White et al., 2009). This often results in artists adopting an entrepreneurial approach to price setting and valuation. At the same time, there will also be artists intrinsically motivated in making their art.

### **Value constructs and the notion of art as a product:**

The art product differs from many other contexts since it contains additional dimensions which conventional marketing theory cannot explain (Hirschman, 1983), and which therefore shape its value in different ways beyond the economic versus non-economic. The cultural value concept can assist here (Holden, 2006; Throsby, 2003; O'Brien, 2015):

[cultural value] is used to refer to the effects that culture has on those who experience it and the difference it makes to individuals and society (Crossick & Kaszynska 2014, 124).

Fillis, Lee & Fraser (2015), for example, uncovered extensive evidence of non-economic aspects of cultural value in their study of emerging contemporary artists, with symbolic value being of specific interest to many stakeholders (McCracken, 1990; Throsby, 2001). The emerging artists they interviewed expressed a variety of attitudes towards marketplace engagement, with some exhibiting high levels of entrepreneurial behaviour concerning their practice and what they saw as their art products, while others expressed much more personal non product related behaviours in making their art.

Other contributing forms of value which influence perception and practice of art as a product include market and financial value (Bonus & Ronte 1997). Cultural consumption processes also impact the art versus product dynamic in extracting meaning from the structure and movement surrounding these interactions (McCracken, 1990; Sullivan & Catz-Gerro, 2007). Aesthetic and experiential processes are also important contributors (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Venkatesh & Meamber, 2006). The long-held exchange and use perspective can also have influence (Penaloza and Venkatesh 2006; Arnould, 2014). Co-creation and co-production activities by both producer and consumer also impact (Meyer & Even, 1998; Gronroos, 2012). Since art is experience based (Boorsma, 2006), this also has a role in determining cultural

value. As well as the previously mentioned intrinsic value of the art in its own right (Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry, 1989; Preece, 2014), other contributing factors include the extrinsic (external), instrumental (relating to social, economic or policy outcomes (Belfiore & Bennett, 2007), institutional factors and public value for money (Bakhshi, Freeman & Hitchen, 2009).

Following our review of the literature, we visualise the following relationships in shaping artists' relationship with the product notion. Perception of art as a product depends, firstly, on the artist's philosophical position on the role of art in society, and then on other stakeholders' philosophical stances. A related connection concerns how the concept of art as a product can evolve over time as the career of the artist develops. Further connections relate to the artist's association, or otherwise, with the market, as well as their artistic success. Entrepreneurial marketing practices are important here. We can infer that the various forms of value generated from both artist and other stakeholders' perspectives also contribute to the notion of art as a product. These relationships form the basis for our analysis framework presented in Table 1, which we use to guide our thinking and establish the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the relationship between an artist and what they produce?

RQ2: How can knowing this expand our understanding of art as a product?

**Table 1: Analysis Framework**

<b>Artist</b>	<b>Other stakeholders</b>
Artist's philosophical position	Other stakeholders' philosophical position
Career stage of the artist – Artistic success trajectory – Association or otherwise with the market	Reputation of the artist in the art world – Level of brand awareness – Attitudes towards – Development over time
Various forms of value generated by the artist	Various forms of value generated by the consumer

## Methodology:

In order to address these research questions, we carried out a series of semi-structured interviews with sixteen established Australian visual artists. The interviewees were drawn from a shortlist compiled by an expert panel made up of individuals known to the researchers. The artists were deemed ‘established’ according to criteria set out by Lehman and Wickham (2014), that is, they now had a significant reputation in the art world and worked at maintaining their status as professional artists. Interviewing established artists allowed us to assess those individuals with an in-depth understanding of the ‘art as product’ notion. Interviewees were all represented by commercial galleries, had post-graduate qualifications in fine arts, and were experienced in market facing and market creating choices. The demographic characteristics and art discipline details of the participants are provided in Table 2. The broad range of art disciplines covered ensured our sample represented as many art-product types as possible. In relation to their demographic characteristics, the sample reflects the national population of visual artists in Australia (see Throsby and Peteskaya, 2017).

**Table 2: Summary of Interviewees**

Interviewee no.	Residence	Gender	Highest degree	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	F	MFA	Photography
11	Launceston	M	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

The interview schedule was based on the analysis framework (noted in Table 1 above), as well as our own understanding of the sector as advanced researchers in the domain. Questions focused on internal and external impacts on making the art, as well as philosophical perceptions of where the art is situated; for example, the factors behind personal decision making in producing the art; visual art production over the length of the artists' careers; peer influences; consumer demand; and relationships and networks. We therefore allowed the artists to speak on their own terms (O'Reilly, 2005). Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and were transcribed into Microsoft Word documents. The transcripts were then subject to a rigorous analysis process (Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton, 2013), using NVivo (Neumann, 2003). Firstly, they were entered into the qualitative data analysis software NVivo so they could be codified for qualitative analysis and subsequent theory building (Bazeley & Jackson, 2010). In the process we adopted the coding rules determine the coded text, and which was then subject to an analysis process to highlight themes that were common across the data. These then were presented as representative quotes in the results as required. The first round of coding involved the data being interrogated to detect any significant themes that emerged in terms of the artist's relationships within the art world. The first-round coding rules are set out in Table 3. The emergent themes detected in the analysis formed the basis for establishing the second-round of data coding categories, a refining process which also allowed us look for theoretical coherence. These refined categories focused on 'artist motivation', 'external influences', and 'art market interactions'. The coded data was then further interrogated to identify any links to the theoretical elements of the product concept from our literature review, as per our analysis framework in Table 1. This process revealed

three distinct themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The first theme relates to the development of an artist's motivation to create. The second concerns their involvement with the art market. The third is an overarching theme informed by the previous two, namely, 'attitude towards art as a product'.

**Table 3: First Round Coding Rules**

<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, or plans.
<b>Interactions with the Art Market</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, or plans.

To ensure that coding of data was consistent with the coding rules, inter-coder reliability checks were undertaken utilising processes suggested by Compton, Love, and Sell (2012). Firstly, the researchers established and pre-tested a sample of 5 interview responses against the NVivo nodes and coding rules presented in Table 3. Secondly the researchers agreed on how to deal with data that did not neatly align with established nodes and coding rules, or could be coded to more than one node. In addition, the researchers utilised the memo tool within the NVivo software package to notate the analysis process and assist the verification of findings and development of theory (see Wilson, 1985). For example, during this process memo reports were generated which provided the researchers with the opportunity to further analyse and reflect upon the emerging trends and themes (see the second-round coding process above), and to generate empirical knowledge via the creation and retention of memos concerning the data, coding categories, and emergent relationships.



As noted above, the coding process revealed three distinct themes that provide insight into the perceptions of artists on art as a product and thereby allowing a greater understanding of the nature of the art product. The first theme relates to the development of an artist's motivation to create. The second concerns their involvement with the art market. The third is an overarching theme informed by the previous two, namely, 'attitude towards art as a product'. These will be discussed in the following sections.

### **Findings:**

The interview excerpts we include in our paper are representative of the views of our other participants. At times there will be differences in opinions and we have endeavoured to represent this. Connections are made with the entrepreneurial marketing domain in teasing out similarities and differences with other sectors.

### **Artists' motivation to create:**

Motives for being an artist, and pursuing an artistic career, are mostly intrinsic and highly personal (Fillis 2004; O'Reilly 2005), in the same manner that an owner/manager of a microenterprise will influence the direction of the business (Fillis, 2011). Furthermore, such motives to create need to accommodate an extended career path that is frequently difficult and subject to numerous external influences (Rodner & Thomson, 2013). Interviewee 14 believes that it can take ten years to be ready to take on the art world, when:

...you have a strong enough knowledge and skill space to allow you relatively independently to approach, organise, problem solve, trouble shoot, self-critique and so on. And to manage.

Clearly, it is difficult for an artist to produce market facing products early in their career, given the development time required to secure the necessary competencies in making high quality

work (Evrard, 1991; Carson et al. 1995). In our view, the notion of a linear career progression and a conventional approach to new product development is not apparent in the art world (Pitta & Pitta, 2012).

Interviewee 7 explains the process and timeframe behind him becoming an artist:

...I trained in the U.K... and it was probably towards the end of my... studies I gave myself the window of three years of trying to be an artist...and I think I decided that if I hadn't become an artist by then...I was going to become a taxi driver or something... But it was... on graduation from my master's degree that I probably saw myself as being an artist.

Clearly, artistic creation involves factors which do not tend to apply in other contexts, including it being embedded in the everyday life of the artist. The time taken to make the work does not align to commercialisation or utility (Lash & Urry, 2002). Rather, there is alignment to the market creation activities of the entrepreneurial marketer (Lehman, Miles and Fillis, 2014). For Interviewee 12 it was an unplanned, serendipitous opportunity, again aligning to entrepreneurial marketing practice, before strategic orientation emerges.

...Quality of work is often driven just by time... As a creative individual you learn to... simultaneously trust your ability to produce more... So you're producing all the time but knowing most of it is at best speculative... it's this idea that not everything is useful...

Artists may not know at the start of the creative process what the work will end up becoming. The motivation to create is an innate need which often exceeds the need to know what will actually be created. This also aligns to broader entrepreneurial marketing practice in the arts where creativity is paramount but no specific endpoint has been identified (Fillis and Lehman, 2021). Interviewee 14 illustrates this motivation:

...it's chicken and the egg stuff... the more you practice, the more ideas you come up with.... I think it really does come down to some kind of innate... thing in me to want to make pictures...

Interviewee 2's motivation comes from the enjoyment of creating and thinking about its retrospective value. This artist also reinforces the idea that making art is not a continual process:

...it's thinking about art in interesting ways... those sorts of things, they come in fits and starts. It's not always one kind of flat line approach...

Interviewee 2 also notes that receiving positive feedback from a close network is important in terms of intrinsic motivation, rather than from any commercial success. This is akin to the personal contact networks developed and utilised by entrepreneurial marketers (Jones and Rowley, 2011).

For Interviewee 4, the main motivation is the making process, not the post creation exhibiting and selling activities. This illustrates the high level of creativity required of the entrepreneurial marketer in generating the product (Fillis, 2002):

.. I just get totally involved in... whatever project I happen to be working on. So the motivation and the excitement... is in bringing a body of work together. And I'm afraid after that I lose interest a little bit. So, the exhibition...is almost like a by-product. For me, what keeps me ticking is... the making of the work...

The purpose of using the above interview excerpt is to illustrate a particular attitude or disposition towards the art during its making, and to also show how this changes once it leaves the studio. Interviewee 3 wanted from an early stage to produce something unique. He highlights the intrinsic value in the making process (Holden, 2006), describing how motivation impacts. Interviewee 7 identifies his peer group influences as important in stimulating the motivation to create the art.

Thus, the path to becoming an artist appears to impact how he or she develops an association with the notion of art as a product. It can take time for some individuals to acknowledge themselves as 'an artist', even though peers and others may have long acknowledged their

creative ability. In addition, there is often a tension between the artist's idealism and external market forces, including the need to make money (Hirschman, 1983; O'Reilly, 2005; Fillis, 2006; 2010).

### **Involvement with the art market:**

Celebrity artists such as Andy Warhol and Pablo Picasso could manipulate the art world and 'work' the marketing system to their advantage (Kerrigan, Brownlie, Hewer & Daza-LeTouze, 2011; Muñiz, Norris & Fine, 2014). However, for artists in earlier stages of their career there are not the same opportunities (Lehman & Wickham, 2014). Fillis (2015), however, notes how artists at all stages of their careers can make use of entrepreneurial marketing techniques to access or create markets and develop their work.

Galleries also have an influence here, from promoting the individuality of the artist's work to exerting subtle pressure on artists to create what the gallery wants. Interviewee 14 considers the impact of the market on what he does, with engagement depending on the context:

...I want to develop and redeploy an aspect of my work which is for [the] commercial market...I think as a practitioner today it's really important to be really abreast of the different levels at which art operates and the spaces it occupies and who hosts it and to be very...clear headed about what you're able to do...Now it's understanding you're complicit in a system...it's always finding gaps and breaks and fractures in a system and to try and instigate those that it becomes important.

Even though the idea behind the art may have what Interviewee 14 calls 'aesthetic weight' it may also be of interest to a commercial gallery. There may also be a need for a balance between self-oriented creativity and creating for the market for those artists who strive to survive financially through their work. Entrepreneurial marketing practices can assist in both these contexts in identifying and exploiting opportunities (Morris et al., 2002). Interviewee 14 is suggesting that it all comes down to common sense in terms of an artwork's viability within

the art market. However, for emerging artists it can be more complex. For them, a gallery likes to demonstrate its association with 'the street end of everything' and may be more willing to take a risk (White et al., 2009).

Rather than necessarily paying attention to the market, Interviewee 5 talks about the need to keep evolving:

...the market shifts all the time...I think what's really crucial for me anyway is... that the practice has to keep moving, it has to keep being innovative...basically it needs to keep me interested....I'm not the type of artist that has struck on a particular technique and keeps making the same product...with small iterations over and over and over again. Every body of work, every time I approach something it's different, and that's not necessarily fantastic for a market.

So the need to continually evolve artistic practice here introduces a dynamism that is not present in many other product categories.

However, producing a range of work for different audiences does suggest a degree of market orientation (Narver and Slater, 1990). In particular, we see similarities but also differences in specific element of their Figure 1 (p.23) such as customer orientation, competitor orientation and long term profit focus. Artists create but also co-create and can also be viewed as customers or consumers. Competition may also affect what the artist produces. Some artists have an overt profit motive but others do not. Also, an artist rarely has complete control over what he or she wants to do, given the need to apply for grants, exhibitions etc. Effectuation as part of entrepreneurial marketing practice or being able to do what you want to do with the means at your disposal (Fillis, Lehman and Miles, 2016), is therefore being practiced but it does have its limitations at times, given the specific aspects of the art sector. Interviewee 5, however, feels he acts strategically and knowingly:

I think it's more about being more strategic within that field, understanding where you're coming from, what you want to say, what you want to get out of it, and being able to

manipulate that system in a creative way, to actually produce what you want when you want...

This again evidences artist led production, rather than necessarily always following the demands of the art market. However, despite many artists' declared market independence, Interviewee 3 assesses how an artist's economic situation can necessitate alignment with the market, including knowing what will actually sell:

...it's a very different thing when you're actually trying to live off some work. You do have to give consideration to the sort of work you're doing. And I sometimes regret this, and I've had discussions recently where I have called it 'feeding the beast' and I've decided I'm not going to do it anymore. You think about an exhibition coming up so you tend to do a picture which you know and then you tend to think, "Well I can do a small version, a study." That is just basic common sense.

For Interviewee 16 the focus is on securing the ability to create an artistic identity in order to be noticed:

One of the things about being an artist is that... you have to create some sort of persona around yourself, you have to identify with something. And... if you want...to have an art career, number one is you've got to identify as an artist... And then secondly... a lot of people create some kind of methodology... around themselves, whether that's identifying of a tradition of painting, or whether that's saying I'm this kind of artist... It could be anything. But I think most artists have some kind of thing that surrounds their practice... like maybe it's a manifesto, maybe it's a strongly held political belief, or it's just this is how I do my work, I must maintain this kind of method or practice, or whatever... I think that's part of being an artist, just having that identification with something...

She is clearly making connections here with the artist as a brand (O'Reilly, 2005; Schroeder, 2005) but is not comfortable with the language used. Being uncomfortable with formal business terminologies is also found across entrepreneurial marketing practices elsewhere:

...the word just makes my skin crawl...I like to think 'cause of the way I identify myself is very far removed from marketing and branding...I think a lot of artists...very consciously brand, their art is their brand.... I do understand how you can connect the two, and I think they're probably very similar things, they just might have a different core belief system, or outcome...

She admits that some artists willingly embrace the connection with branding in order to sell their work without any apparent artistic conflict. She is clear that what she expresses is on her own terms and there is no conscious leanings towards a particular market. She feels that, despite pressure from industry, artists need to learn to say no sometimes to these market-led opportunities. However, over-exposure to the market can be problematic for an artist seeking recognition in that their artistic standing can become diluted. So, to advance artistically can mean turning down market-driven opportunities. Interviewee 6 notes how he changes orientation towards his art when making work specifically to sell. This can be viewed as a dynamic art making orientation, moving between ‘for the market’ and ‘for the self’ positions, and also illustrates the flexibility found in entrepreneurial marketing practice (Hansen and Hills, 2004).

The artist’s philosophical position on market engagement appears to have a bearing on whether what is produced is perceived as a product. As the artist’s career develops, the association with the market may change. Some successful artists can manipulate the market, such is the brand power of their work (Schroeder, 2005; Preece, Kerrigan & O’Reilly, 2016). These artists appear to place art closer to the notion of ‘pure product’, albeit without losing its aesthetic and cultural value.

### **Attitude towards art as a product:**

In many ways, this theme is informed by the previous two, as both appear to ‘shape’ the artists’ attitudes. Certainly, artists’ motivation to create appears to alter as they progress along a career path (Lehman & Wickham, 2014). They have to accommodate changing circumstances brought on by a developing relationship with their market: their attitudes to where their output fits into the art world changes. For instance, Interviewee 14 refers to art as a form of knowledge which

relates to higher levels of product conceptualisation beyond core, embodied and augmented levels (Lehman, Wickham & Fillis, 2014). For him it is the ‘overarching idea of discourse and exchange of ideas’ which is important. He also refers to the commodity value of the art (Plattner, 1998), as well as a more abstract value or cultural esteem value (Throsby, 2000).

These interpretations indicate that the art product is a fluid concept, and this is where an entrepreneurial marketing lens linked to flexibility can aid understanding. Interviewee 14 believes that ‘ultimately it’s really all to do with perceptions and market value’ (Holden, 2006). Where the artwork is exhibited also influences its symbolic and other values relating to the marketplace and the notion of ‘product.’ Interviewee 5 visualises art in terms of being a cultural product in relation to the value systems in operation. He also sees what he does as a type of business, giving further credence to the use of the entrepreneurial marketing lens. Interviewee 2 also sees his art as much more than a product in terms of the complex values associated with it:

...it's a similar sort of thing to being asked to do a talk, or a symposium about your work. You feel that...stuff is being looked at in ways that you always hoped it will be looked at as an artwork. Like an artwork is not just a product, that it gains you an income. That in fact first and foremost is this thing that serves a purpose for our culture to discuss issues, to talk about the things that you have that are in the artwork. And when that happens, and it happens rarely, it makes an impact. So yeah, that's definitely up there.

Interviewee 6 explains that the creative process behind his art makes it difficult to think of his work as a market facing product but rather as something to be experienced (Pine and Gilmore 1999). He also admits that the tangibility of his work could define it as a product, but he sees it more of a work or even a cultural artefact, as per Interviewee 14:

It's a tough question isn't it?...Well it is a product...I think of it as a work, as an entity of its own. And once...it's out there in public in someone's collection or hanging on a wall or in the foyer of the State library, it does have a life of its own and people interact with it...Do you call a book a product? In a sense it is but that too is a result of...artistic expression and so it's like calling things in a gallery products. They're cultural artefacts really.



Interviewee 7 visualises a triangular relationship between the art, artist and audience which teases out the art/product relationship further:

...when it does enter the world...it certainly isn't of me anymore. I've always quite liked the idea of art...is the middle of a triangle; the corners of the triangle are the artist, the audience and the artwork but the actual art...sits between those two entities and isn't owned by any of them. So the art as a product, I guess, is always kind of mobile and unstable and being generated. The art, artefact... well you just hope it has a life in the world if it goes on is an interest and finds its way...

The level of engagement with the market has a bearing on the attitudes of the artists to the notion of art as a product. For example, Interviewee 9 discusses how some artists deliberately position their art as a product, with institutions then commodifying this through reproduction sales (and therefore making it a product through art-based entrepreneurial marketing processes), but this does not necessarily mean that the original is not art.

Interviewee 15 sees the connection between art and product as a natural one, with an interplay of values being involved. It could be preferable to position art as a product in a more fluid way:

...I think that that's what really interesting... is that it's a sliding scale or a continuum, or it's not even that, it's not even linear, it's a cloud...of possibilities....well I think what really tends to keep people interested in art over a long period of time...is its inability to be defined...

This continuum might have art as a product at one end, with art as an aesthetic object at the other, with audience, gallery and institutional effects impacting to varying degrees. Linking to the notion of career stage, and how the artist has developed, artists in the established and famous stages of their careers also have a greater say or control over how and where their art is being positioned. Entrepreneurial marketing practices can be in place at each of these stages.

## **Discussion and Conclusion:**

In this paper our overall aim has been to critically assess the engagement by artists with the term ‘product’ in relation to their art, including engagement with the market, or otherwise, in terms of developing their work and career. We did this through the adoption of the entrepreneurial marketing lens in teasing out the connections between the notion of product and its relationship to a means of production not driven by consumer demand. We sought to assess the notion of product by enabling ideas, conceptualisations, critical thinking, and experiences to contribute to the current state of theoretical understanding. Towards these aims we posited the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the relationship between an artist and what they produce?

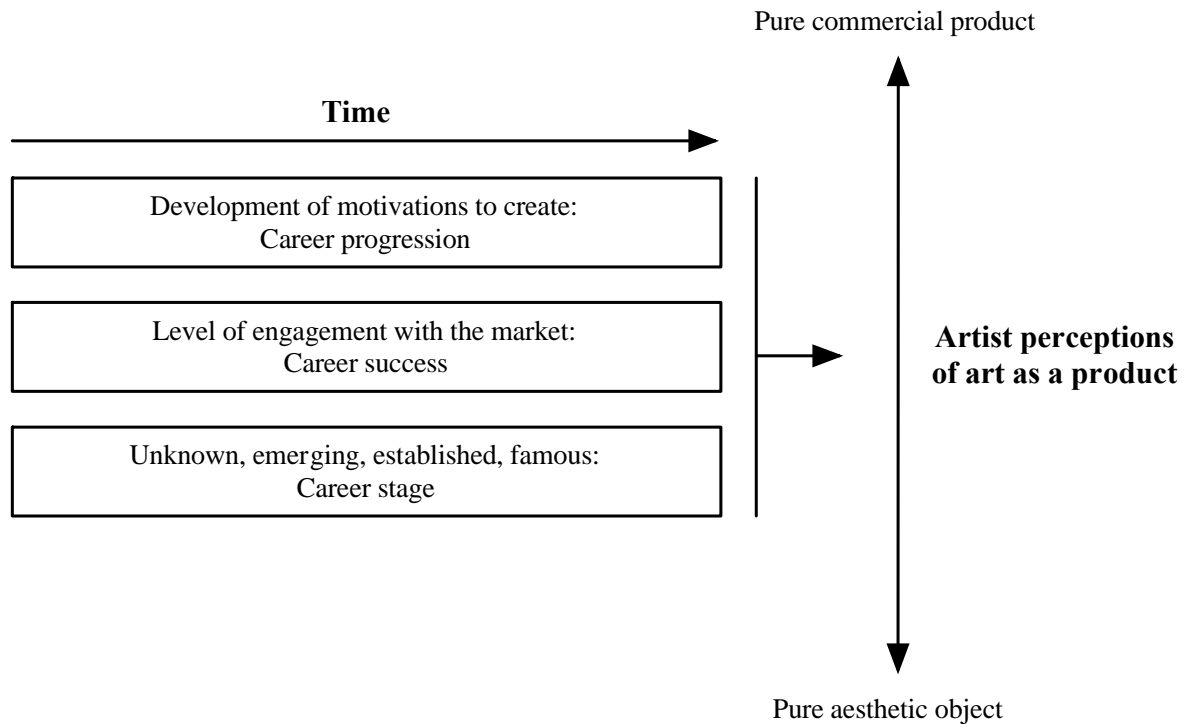
RQ2: How can knowing this expand our understanding of art as a product?

In addressing these questions, our analysis demonstrates that the degree of engagement by the artist with the market has a central role to play. Rightly, theories around art as a product need to focus on the aesthetic (Fillis 2006). However, aesthetics are not necessarily the sole driver of production. As we have demonstrated, initially, the art is shaped by the artists’ identity, personality and career history. Co-creation of value between the artist, audience (including wider society), gallery or other creative space further complicates the product notion and the relationship as ‘ownership’ moves away from the original producer of the work. Shared and sometimes contradictory discourse also contribute to the conversation surrounding the artwork and the artist. It is this collective action by a variety of stakeholders which impacts on the product notion too. Art can be viewed as a cultural product which holds a cultural value which other entities do not (Belfiore 2020). Artist and art brand value provide further association. Symbolic value interacts with commodity value as art is traded in the marketplace and interested stakeholders associate value with the art. A potential solution to the debate is to accept that art contains a variety of values which are able to be assessed through the

entrepreneurial marketing lens. We position artists' perception of art as a product on a continuum, ranging from the purely commercial at one end to art as an aesthetic object at the other end. A variety of values are expressed or held as we move along this continuum. Viewing the artist as an entrepreneurial marketer has assisted in developing this understanding. This contrasts with other models of art production where the major components are viewed as a machine or system (see, for example, Jyrama & Ayvari, 2010; Rodner & Thomson 2013).

In our view there is a fluidity in the relationship between an artist and their work that has not been reflected in previous theory building. Drawing on our findings, we present the following Factors Affecting Artist Perceptions model (see Figure 1) which outlines the dimensions that influence artists' perceptions of their work. Clearly, the artist's motivation to create, and the time taken to produce the art are additional differentiators in positioning art differently from other entities. When an artist sets out to create an artwork there is often no sense of what the end 'product' will look like, with the process of creation involving both planned and unplanned creativity. Other impacting influences include peer group effects and the artist's own idealism. Some established artists are able to manipulate the market, while also producing work for different audiences. As the artist becomes more experienced and moves along their career trajectory, there is often an evolution of practice in evidence.

**Figure 1: Factors Affecting Artist Perceptions model**



We believe that there are two crucial aspects to consider when modelling the factors that affect artists' perception of art as a product. The first is the notion of there being some form of continuum ranging from 'Pure commercial product' to 'Pure aesthetic object'. We have not sought to define either end point here—others have considered product from this perspective (e.g., Hirschman, 1983; Venkatesh & Meamber, 2006). Rather, we introduce the idea that an artist's perception can fall along a continuum between the two according to a number of influencing factors, namely, career progression, career success, and career stage. The second crucial aspect to consider is how these three factors develop over time. In the case of career progression, the way an artist's motivation to create develops as they move along the path to 'becoming an artist' affects how he or she feels about their work, the notion of art as a product.

Similarly, the nature of their engagement with the market changes their perception of the art product over time. The more artists have to interact with market forces, the greater their level

of success, the less they are concerned with the issue of ‘selling out’—they are more pragmatic about how to use the market to further their artistic aims. There is, then, a range of possible philosophical positions. The third factor that changes over time is career stage. Clearly there are different pressures on, for example, emerging artists (Lee and Lee 2016) than there are on established artists which results in different behaviours in relation to the market (Fillis, Lee & Fraser, 2015; Lehman & Wickham, 2014). But it is also the case that artists’ perceptions of art as a product changes as they move through the various career stages. Emerging artists may well have a more idealistic view of their work than a successful mid-career artist, which is not to say that such an artist would simply view their work as a pure commercial product.

We had indicated that there were merits of adopting a product approach in engaging with the market and artist centred creation which avoids marketplace interaction. The implications for practice from our research are twofold. Firstly, this paper provides a means by which artists can more accurately conceptualise the relationship they have with their art within the art production process. Reflection on motives to create, and on other facets of their art practice, may not be the norm for artists, but for those looking to further their career and make a living from their art such reflection is vital. Art-based entrepreneurial marketing is part of this process. Secondly, we have provided a more nuanced understanding of the artist/artwork relationship which will be of benefit for those stakeholders in the art world that manage or interact with artists. Commercial galleries, in particular, will find it useful to visualise the link between the stage of an artist’s career and their perception of their art as a product. Similarly, those stakeholders more concerned with the aesthetic, such as curators and art galleries, will have a clearer understanding of artists’ motivation to create.

As regards future research, we believe that our model could be enhanced by exploring the perceptions of those interested stakeholders noted above, as well as audiences, collectors, and arts managers. Additionally, an area for future research could involve the following questions: ‘How does the visual artists’ stage of development align with the co-creation process?’ ‘How does entrepreneurial marketing aid this co-creation process?’ At an early career stage it is not really co-creation which dominates. Rather it is production. At a later stage, it is co-creation because of the intent of the artwork and the interactions with specifically interested parties. It could be argued that an unknown artist must make a product to get noticed by the players in the market in the first place, but then what they make becomes art if they become successful producers. An implication might be: if you’re an art-for-art’s-sake unknown artist, be as aesthetic as you like, and if you’re truly talented, you’ll get noticed. However, if you are an aspiring artist who is not sure of their talent, then you had better create a product that might garner interest from those in the art world. If successful, you can focus on art-for-art’s sake philosophies and practices. In saying this, a small number of artists do achieve success without following the market and its product imbuing tendencies.

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