

‘THERE'S ALWAYS BITS OF ME IN THE ART’

AN EXPLORATION OF THE ARTIST AS CULTURAL AND CREATIVE
WORKER, SOCIAL FACILITATOR AND MEANING MAKER.

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Thesis submitted for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the discipline of Anthropology,
School of Social Sciences,
Faculty of Arts,
University of Adelaide
December, 2017

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ABSTRACT

This thesis, which explores the lives and work of South Australian artists, argues that artists are seen, and see themselves, as occupiers of a special, and necessarily contradictory, social facilitation role, that is characterised by the granting of certain social benefits and latitudes, and by the assumption and performance of community obligations. Within the thesis the role of artist is positioned as one that is developed through both formal and informal social structures and practices, including those imposed through disciplinary traditions and the socially normalised ways of belonging to the contemporary Australian art world. In this capacity, this thesis positions artists as a group of individuals who play a key role in skilfully appropriating and utilising the symbolic, spatial and material elements of society in order to uphold, represent, support or contest certain aspects of that social world.

The thesis explores the way in which the artists' themselves understand, develop and maintain this special status through the work they continuously invest in, becoming legitimate art practitioners in key aspects of their work and social lives. It argues that this state of legitimacy is established and maintained in a number of ways that are both personally and externally determined, including in relation to the artist's perceived level of technical, creative, social, critical and financial achievement in the arts. Within this context, the thesis addresses a number of questions, including how an individual begins to see themselves as an artist, what compels them to choose to become an artist, and what are the factors that are taken into consideration in order for someone to work legitimately as an artist.

The research and analysis presented in this thesis provides a contribution to the existing body of knowledge of the art world and art practice, with particular reference to understanding artists within the regional Australian context of South Australia, and in relation to the importance of the role of artist to social and cultural maintenance, renewal and production. In this capacity, the thesis supports the development of anthropological knowledge relating to the practice of artists and their use of material culture and space, and the development of social legitimacy within the creative industries through exploring the contributory role of ritual, performance, creativity, education, and the cultivation of social relationships.

DECLARATION

Name: Sandra Howe-Piening

Program: PhD Anthropology

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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Sandra Howe-Piening

21st December, 2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

*No man is an island entire of itself,
every man is a piece of the continent,
a part of the main*

John Donne 1624

During the many years it took me to research and write this thesis I have been fortunate to have been generously supported by both my closest intimates, and by my informants and supervisors. This thesis is dedicated to you all.

I acknowledge and sincerely thank my academic supervisors, Dr. Alison Dundon and Dr. Andrew Skuse. Your comprehensive knowledge, insight and patience was invaluable to me during the long writing process. In particular I want to thank Alison for resolutely and graciously compelling me to the finish line. You are super-woman.

Thank you, also, to my research informants. Your hospitality, generosity, creativity and curiosity will always remind me to have faith in people.

The encouragement and practical support of my family, especially my beautiful daughter and my mum, played a key role in finally completing this thesis. Thank you for always trying to be positive and optimistic, even when life became complicated and difficult.

I also want to thank little Leo for making a much welcomed appearance towards the end of this challenging process. Your cute little face makes me smile.

Writing my thesis took me so long I lost some loved ones along the way. I miss you and wish you were still here.

Finally, I acknowledge and thank my partner Jason, who has been consistently supportive, stoic, interested, compassionate and motivating. Thank you my love.

CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

1.1. A PROJECT ON ART AND ARTISTS IN THE FESTIVAL STATE

Art is an integral part of all societies. It can be said to be a social element that has the effect of beautifying, or delivering points of interest or significant meaning to, public and private spaces, including impacting on places across the full socio-economic spectrum of society. Art also provides a tangible vehicle for the discussion of social, political, ethical or moral matters, including playing a role in supporting the construction, maintenance and transformation of collective and individual social identities. In responding to art's evident social importance, this thesis aims to provide an exploration of the life, work and experience of artists within the context of the contemporary setting of South Australia in the mid-2000's. The thesis aims to explore, and expand the understanding of, the role and practice of artists as cultural and creative workers within society, whilst drawing a more intimate picture of the life and work of the individuals involved in the practice of making art.

The artists who I worked with on this research project were all based in the Australian state of South Australia, which identifies itself as the 'festival' state. South Australia's capital city, Adelaide, currently hosts ten major arts based festivals a year (Festivals Adelaide 2016), and with a long history of initiating and hosting arts based institutions and events, the state prides itself on being Australia's original arts-focused state. The state's organised arts focus began with the inception of the South Australian Society of Arts, which was established by a group of prominent settlers in 1856, and is the oldest Australian fine art society still in existence. During the inception phase of the Society, the primary stated objective of the organisation was to form 'a Society, for the promotion and cultivation of the taste to procure, and knowledge to produce works of art generally, but the fine arts in particular, to be called the South Australian Society of Arts. (Adelaide Observer 1856:1) The Society had, as one of its earliest objectives, the setting up of 'a School and Gallery of Art, on the most liberal and approved principles of the day [which was to] be embodied in the Society.' (Adelaide Observer 1856:1) These objectives were achieved by 1856 (UniSA 2016) and 1881 respectively (Finnimore 2016). South Australia's arts profile was further enhanced in March, 1960 with the hosting of the first, of many, Adelaide Festival of Arts. In January, 1960 the Australian Women's Weekly ran an eight page guide to the first

Festival, providing an indication of its importance to Australian cultural life at the time.¹ Since the first Adelaide Festival of Arts, Adelaide continued to grow its arts pedigree and focus, particularly under the direction and encouragement of Premier Don Dunstan, (1967-68 and 1970-79) whose tenure as Premier was said to mark a turning point in terms of leading a more liberal direction in the state's social policy and practices.

According to the Creative Futures Report (Service Skills SA 2013) South Australia's creative industries, which incorporates visual and performing arts and allied industries, generated 1.34 billion in revenue in 2010/2011, including \$62.9 million contributed to the state's economy by the ten major festivals in 2012. The sector also employed 22,574 people, which represents 2.8% of the state's workforce, and is experiencing a 7.5% employment growth, which is higher than the state average of 5.3%. The South Australian arts arena generally aligns with the current Australian arts climate, which incorporates a range of public funding for galleries, public artworks, and other various art production and education programs. In this capacity ABS data for the 2011-12 period cites the 'Australian Government funded expenditure on arts and culture as being \$1,744.5m' (ABS 2012). The South Australian component of that expenditure figure was \$262.1m, which included expenditure for cultural heritage, museums, media, institutions and a range of art based activities and programs (ABS 2013: 1-3).

The scope of public funding for the arts in South Australia also extends to the local government arena, where there is a strong policy position across all council areas in relation to supporting the full range of arts disciplines, including public art and community arts projects and events. This is exemplified throughout the Adelaide City Council's Arts and Culture Strategy 2010-2014, which makes the point that:

Creativity and its practical application by talented people is widely recognised as a key driver of a successful modern urban economy. The competitive success of a city largely depends on its ability to attract and retain creative and talented people...The arts and cultural sectors of

¹ The introduction of the Women's Weekly article highlighted the scope and value of the event:

This supplement will provide a guide to Adelaide's ambitious project - a wide-scale Festival of Arts based on the famous European festivals at Edinburgh and Salzburg. To be held between March 12 and March 26, it will offer an artistic feast of music, with celebrated soloists, drama, opera, puppet shows, carnivals, and exhibitions of painting, sculpture, and architecture. Massed band and jazz concerts are also planned. Adelaide's streets will be decorated. In planning the Festival, its organisers have not thought in terms of Adelaide alone. It is hoped that this event will put Australia on the world cultural map.

(Australian Women's Weekly 1960: 27)

the 'creative industries' have been a long standing strength in Adelaide contributing much to the City's image interstate and overseas. They establish a core of innovation and have been a vigorous source of economic growth. They also underpin much of the cultural vitality of the City. Consultation with young artists, musicians, writers, designers and business owners in preparation of this strategy found real enthusiasm and commitment to stay in Adelaide and be part of the City's future. This enthusiasm and potential needs a supportive environment in which to flourish, and opportunities to promote engagement between the City's arts and design schools and the wider community, and to combine the creative contribution of science with the arts, have the potential to be further extended.

(Adelaide City Council 2010:13)

1.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework for my research project guided the determination of the project's aims, influences and questions, and provided me with a set of underpinning data and analysis upon which to develop predictions for my own research, and to determine the structures and direction of my project design. The framework for my research begins with my thematic concept (art in South Australia) and its attendant informant cohort who are South Australian 'sole practising' visual artists. Sole practising artist is a term I use to describe those individuals who characterise themselves as artists in the professional sense, and who carry on their artistic practice as individuals, working primarily alone in their own studio environments. The artists I worked with also considered themselves to be 'contemporary artists: the general consensus amongst my informants was that they were contemporary artists because they worked as artists in the present time, and were able to adopt and apply a broad range of artistic disciplines, materials, techniques and styles in their work. My informants largely agreed with Haidy Geismar's definition of contemporary art as 'a discourse institutionalized in the modernist art world, [and as]...a set of material and ideological practices that contain ideas about art worlds, disciplinary boundaries, and the nature of both art and the artist' (Geismar 2015: 184). Reflecting on Geismar's definition, the consensus amongst the artists I worked with was that the essence of contemporary art was the ability to exercise freedom to extend beyond traditional disciplinary, conceptual and practical, boundaries including in terms of subject matter, materials and interpretation of symbolic meaning.

The aim of my research was to expand upon a continually emerging body of international knowledge of visual arts practice and artists' social roles in order to provide an Australian perspective to this knowledge, particularly in relation to the body of research undertaken within the anthropological discipline, and within material culture studies. In particular, the

research and analysis presented in this thesis provides a contribution to the social research on art worlds and art practice, with reference to understanding artists within the regional Australian context of South Australia, and with a focus on the importance of the role of artist to cultural maintenance, renewal and production. The thesis purview does not extend to an examination of the fields of art history or aesthetics, except where contextual background information is required in order to support my discussion of the lives and work practices of my artist informants.

Working from my initial assertion that artists, as a social group, are worthy of being researched because they are the producers of socially significant artefacts that contribute to the social life of South Australia, the project's research problem asks how the informants I worked with experience and undertake their lives and work as artists. Specifically, my project aims to contribute to the framing of art as a form of socially active material culture, and artists as agents at the centre of a web of social relations that are mediated through the material culture of art (ideas that are underpinned by the works of Becker 1984, Morphy 1995, Bourdieu 1997, Gell 1998, Myers and Morphy 1998, Plattner 1998, Myers 2004, Schacter 2014, Wilf 2014, Crawshaw 2015, Hodson 2016).

My research project initially emerged from a previous history in studying and working in visual arts, from which arose an appreciation of a certain ambivalence that is evident in relation to the cultural and social relevance of being an artist in contemporary society. While it was clear from my own perspective of learning to be, and of being, an artist that there was something special about the job beyond the mystical fetishisation of 'talent and creativity', it was never clearly articulated how the special nature of the role was played out in the lives of the artists, or indeed what the purpose or impact of that status might be on a wider social level. It should be noted here that, although I use the terms 'nature, natural or inherent' a number of times within the thesis, it is not my intention to develop a 'nature/nurture' dichotomy but rather to articulate the way in which a sense of a dichotomy was often expressed to me during my work with artists. These terms are commonly used in everyday social speech, and in the media, as a means to explain the presence of talent and creativity, and this was something that was also practiced amongst my informants. The notion of natural and inherent talent and creativity, however, was also expressed as a more complex idea amongst my informants, in terms of the way in which they understood their own development and application of those attributes, and how these attributes were seen to contribute to the trajectory of an artist's career.

In the media, and in popular culture, artists are often seen as being socially transgressive, contradictory and contentious, yet the works, knowledge and products they create have an impact on many areas of the social, political and economic world. Artists play a key role as beneficiaries or promulgators of officially sanctioned and well resourced institutions and policy frameworks and practices, such as arts museums, public art, arts funding, and the Australian and global high arts markets. These institutions and frameworks form part of what is often referred to as a 'cultural economy' - a term that is applied to the discrete economic areas that incorporate a range of cultural and creative industries such as media, visual and performing arts, literature, music and design. The cultural economy is understood to have unique attributes and benefits that separate it from other economic social fields. The Australian Bureau of Statistic cites these benefits as those areas contributing to:

the Australian economy through employment and trade, and assist[ing] with fostering creativity and innovation. Trade in cultural goods and services, both within Australia and internationally, encourage cultural diversity and economic development, and also provide an opportunity for the exchange of ideas.

(ABS 2011)

Artists are considered to be key participants in the cultural economy and, in their ascribed role as cultural and creative workers, they demonstrate a number of unique attributes, as articulated in the Australian Government's National Creative Arts Policy (2013):

Artists and creative practitioners and professionals are at the heart of the cultural economy... it is their work that fills theatres, cinemas, galleries, bookshops and countless digital devices. Writers, visual artists, performers, musicians, composers are like scientists: unique individuals with highly specialised skills, knowledge, discipline and talent, who generate new ideas and new ways of understanding the world.' Artists and creative practitioners and professionals also play an important role as teachers and mentors for the Australian community and the next generation.

(Australian Government 2013:41)

The positive social impact of the creative and cultural economy has precipitated growing investment in cultural activities, including art, that have wider public appeal in order to ensure the achievement of social inclusion outcomes for the community. The socially inclusive public arts are extolled for their capacity to provide an active space for social and spatial regeneration objectives (see Crawshaw & Gkartzios 2016, Crawshaw 2015, Schacter 2014, O'Connor & Coombs 2011). They have, however, also been considered to have the potential to propagate the 'de-legitimization of 'high art' and the erosion of boundaries

between 'art' and 'popular culture' (O'Connor & Coombs 2011: 140) through the active funding of the 'inclusive' model in preference to other, arguably more challenging, forms of art. Working from this context this thesis applies the notion of artists as being 'at the heart of the cultural economy' (Australian Government 2013:41) to develop an understanding of the way in which they understand and experience their role in terms of being a combination of a personal, economic and social pursuit, and how their understanding and experience impacts on their work practices and products. It should be noted here that, while the social benefits associated with a cultural economy are addressed in this thesis through exploring the way in which artists contribute to cultural maintenance and renewal activities, the socio-economic factors that may impact on artists' practices within South Australia is not a part of this thesis' purview.

In the thesis, I position the role of artist as one which is developed through both formal and informal social structures and practices, including those imposed through disciplinary traditions and the socially normalised ways of belonging to the contemporary Australian art world. Within this context, I argue that artists are seen, and see themselves, as occupiers of a special, and necessarily contradictory, social and cultural facilitation role, that is characterised by the granting of certain social benefits and latitudes, and by the assumption and performance of certain social obligations. In this capacity the artist is seen as someone who has a key role in skilfully appropriating and utilising the symbolic, spatial and material elements of society in order to uphold, represent, support or contest certain aspects of that social world. When discussing the role of the artist as a social or cultural facilitator, I do not use the term in a strictly literal sense of the definition, which is, as Doyle states, to be:

An individual who enables groups and organizations to work more effectively, to collaborate and achieve synergy...to be a 'content neutral' party who by not taking sides or expressing or advocating a point of view...can advocate for fair, open, and inclusive procedures to accomplish the group's work.

(Doyle in Kaner, et al., 2007: xiii.).

With a focus on my own research objectives, I take the notion of social or cultural facilitation to be something slightly more subjective and multi-layered where visual artists are concerned, in that the processes are often more about initiating engagement and dialogue rather than working towards a concrete outcome. The result, therefore, can be said to be the achievement of the outcome of stimulating interest, discourse and action that highlights social issues and normative ways of thinking and acting in society. The desired purpose of this can be said to support cultural renewal through the examination,

contestation, embracement or introduction of new social practices, ideas and meanings. The social facilitation role that I attribute to artists is something that, I argue, is recognised and encouraged through a range of official and unofficial channels, such as implicit expectations and mediated representations that are evident both within the art world and across the community. This expectation is also clearly articulated in a range of social policy and mission statements set out in various public and arts related organisations, including those in receipt of public funding (Australian Government 2013), and is represented in the work of art and anthropology researchers (see Danto 1991, Brunstein 1995, Marchart 1998, Farkas 1999, Mullins 2003, Myers 2004, Wallis 2004, Sharpe et al 2005), including those interested in artists contributions to community regeneration and economic development (Crawshaw & Gkartzios 2016, Crawshaw 2015, Coombs 2015, Kester 2011, Schacter 2014, Vickery 2009, Jayne 2004, Miles and Paddison 2005).

The thesis also provides a conceptual framework to explore how artists' own understanding of their special social status is conceptualised, developed and maintained through the work they continuously invest in becoming legitimate art workers in key aspects of their work and social lives. I argue that this state of legitimacy is established and maintained in a number of ways that are both personally and externally determined, including in relation to the artist's perceived level of technical, creative, social, critical and financial achievement in the arts. Within this context I address a number of questions, including how an individual begins to see themselves as an artist, what compels them to choose to become an artist, and what are the factors that are taken into consideration in order for someone to work legitimately as an artist. My aims are underpinned by the work of anthropologists who are interested in the practice of being an artist (see, for example Sharpe et al 2005, Myers 2004, Wallis 2004, Mullins 2003, Farkas 1999, Gell 1998, Marchart 1998, Morphy 1995, Brunstein 1995, Danto 1991, Becker 1984), including those researchers dealing with concepts of ritual, embodiment, intersubjectivity, creativity and talent, practices of which are argued to underpin the processes of becoming an expert practitioner (Ericsson et al 1993, O'Connor 2007, Wright 2012, Wilf 2014, Hodson 2016).

The picture that emerges of the artists' lives, work and social impact is one which highlights the highly integrated nature of their professional and private worlds, something that sits in contrast with many other contemporary professions where the work and domestic worlds of participants are well compartmentalised. Within this context, the persona of the artist incorporates their work as object makers, who symbolically represent the social world,

whilst also encompassing a more personal understanding of their work as a 'calling' (see Weber 1905: 78-92), a vocational imperative if you will. I argue that the ways in which both of these collective and personal elements of the role are met is through the skilled symbolic manipulation and management of their material and social world, with the objective being to create and present meaningful material objects to a wider audience of people who are engaged with the art world on a range of levels. Internalising and assuming this position of cultural facilitator and symbolic object maker inducts artists into an holistic practice, which incorporates and integrates the public and the private elements of the individual art maker's life. This thesis, therefore, frames art practice as a special social and cultural phenomenon, which is expressed through key aspects of the life and work of artists incorporating their engagement with the world through their relationships with friends and colleagues, their art making practices, tools and artworks, their work and financial arrangements, and the way in which they construct and interact with spaces, such as their studios. The notion of artists living and working in an integrated manner, and feeling an imperative to make art, has been a subject of interest for a number of social researchers, including Plattner who categorised a group of his informants as 'art for art's sake' artists' (Plattner 1996:79), who say that 'it's not a job at all. It's what I do, it's who I am.' (Ibid). This way of understanding themselves as having an inherent need to make art for art's sake is a compelling idea that was strongly adopted by my informants as a primary reason they became artists.

The conceptual framework upon which I based my project was underpinned and guided by a growing body of anthropological literature of art that preceded my own research. The following section provides an overview of the research within this continually developing field.

1.3. ART AND ANTHROPOLOGY

Art is all around us, yet the question 'what is art?' is still part of an enduring discussion that focuses on its role and purpose in society. This question invariably elicits a broad range of responses, of varying complexity or depth, which are dependent upon the assertion of different social perspectives, agendas or positions. For example, Tolstoy asserts that art is not a magical phenomenon but has the capacity to unite people through the elicitation of feeling:

‘Art is not, as the metaphysicians say, the manifestation of some mysterious idea of beauty or God, it is not, as the aesthetical physiologists say, a game in which man lets off his excess of stored-up energy, it is not the expression of man’s emotions by external signs, it is not the production of pleasing objects, and, above all, it is not pleasure, but it is a means of union among men, joining them together in the same feelings, and indispensable for the life and progress toward well-being of individuals and of humanity.’

(Tolstoy & Aylmer 1930: 4)

Hughes concurs with this sentiment but focuses on art's ability to reflect the social world in which it is made:

The basic project of art is always to make the world whole and comprehensible, to restore it to us in all its glory and its occasional nastiness, not through argument but through feeling, and then to close the gap between you and everything that is not you, and in this way pass from feeling to meaning. It's not something that committees can do. It's not a task achieved by groups or by movements. It's done by individuals, each person mediating in some way between a sense of history and an experience of the world.

(Hughes 1991: 2)

Other interpretations of what art means focus on the compulsive nature, or calling, of art (see Zola quoted in Chang 2006, Plattner 1996:79, Brunstein 1995:251-258, Munch quoted in Stang 1977, Duchamp quoted in Richter 1964), or on art's ability to affect or change people and society (such as Weiwei 2011, Lippard 1995:72).

Within an anthropological framework, Maruska Svasek proposes a socially bound and contextual definition for art, and argues that 'taking art out of its social and historical setting to analyse and explain other social or cultural habits, presupposes that definitions of art are somehow timeless and free from preconceived ideas, which clearly is not the case' (Svasek 2008: 3). She expands on this by highlighting the important role of geographic and temporal context in determining what is considered to be art. Svasek refers to this process as 'transit and transition', in which 'transit records the location or movement of objects over time and across social or geographic boundaries, while transition analyses the meaning, value and status of those objects, as well as how people experience them' (Ibid: 4). In

positioning the definition of art in this manner, Svasek's argument frames the contentious question of 'what is art?' in terms of its social qualities and effect, asserting that they are 'not a straightforward descriptive category of objects with inherent qualities that can be objectively isolated and compared...[but instead] have what Igor Kopytoff (1986) calls their own 'cultural biographies', or what sociologist Vera Zolberg (1990) describes as their own 'careers' – descriptions intended to stress the movement of artefacts and their reception over time' (2008: 9).

Historically within the discipline of anthropology there has long been an indirect engagement with art and artists through studies that incorporated these elements as integrated components of traditional societies, rather than as their own distinct category (see, for example Franz Boas 1927). Morphy and Perkins refer to the historical lack of focus on art as a discrete anthropological category as having its roots in the fact that anthropologists predominantly came from western backgrounds and were, therefore, naturalised into understanding art as a 'high culture' category, a very special group of objects with specific aesthetic and social attributes that were considered to have no cross-cultural equivalents (Morphy and Perkins 2006:8). The unique nature of the western cultural category of art made it initially difficult for anthropologists to remove themselves from the strongly held assumptions about art within the western context, but when this did eventually happen a more all-encompassing, cross-cultural, framework of enquiry was gradually developed for research on art and art practice.

The term 'western art', when used in the context of this thesis relates to the way it is most commonly applied in the contemporary art history disciplinary field, as follows:

Western art largely describes the art of western Europe, but is also used as a general category for forms of art that are now geographically widespread but that have their roots in Europe. Art historians describe the history of Western art in terms of successive periods and/or movements, including classical, medieval, Byzantine, Romanesque, Renaissance, baroque, rococo, neoclassicism, Romanticism, realism, Impressionism, modernism and postmodernism. Definitions of these periods are often debated, as it is impossible to pinpoint where they begin and end, or to account for the wide array of art produced within them. Nevertheless, such terms are indispensable in navigating the complex history and stylistic shifts of Western art across time.

Art Gallery of NSW 2017

In the western art world of the beginning of the twentieth century, there was an increase in artistic interest in the category of 'primitive art' as a source of inspiration, naive wisdom,

and new symbolic possibilities for artists. This so called primitive (or naive or symbolic) art began to be selectively chosen, exhibited and copied, with the objective to display it within the art world's existing evaluation and aesthetic frameworks (Phillips 2015). This rising interest in primitive art coincided with an increase in the popularity of symbolism and semiotics in social theory, analytical frameworks which seemed perfect for the exploration of these enigmatic cultural objects (Wagner 2001). The interest in 'primitive' art went on to inform the modernist period, which was a significant transformative period in art history, but the practice of appropriating and understanding these objects within the evaluation frameworks of the western art world was later considered to be problematic due to the culturally relativist nature of such a paradigm (Dahl & Stade 2000).

Within anthropology, from the 1980's onwards, there was a growing interest in addressing the problems of culture relativism in the analysis of art objects through developing a distinct category of art anthropology that would provide a framework for the cross-cultural definition and analysis of art objects and art practice. For example, when reflecting on the historically narrow focus of anthropological studies of art objects and practices in traditional societies, Morphy and Perkins concluded that 'to create a more holistic view of cross-cultural art practice, it has become important for the anthropology of art to move beyond its predominant focus on small scale societies, and address practices in art systems where that has been a long tradition of art historical practice and a culturally specific recognition of certain material as art objects and certain individuals as artists.' (Morphy and Perkins 2006:4) The growing imperative to expand the study of art to include societies in which there is a distinct category of 'art' and of 'artist', supported the development of an anthropology of art, which was based on criteria that was not primarily dependent upon the disciplines of art history or aesthetics for its evaluation frameworks (though would not completely discount these constructs where the context was appropriate) but incorporated a multi-disciplinary approach informed, amongst others, by studies of material culture (Hodson 2016, Schacter 2014, Sjöholm 2013, Gell 1998), ritual and performance (Hodson 2016, Wilf 2014, Atkinson 2013, Sjöholm 2013, O'Connor 2007, Morphy 1995), labour markets and economics (Crawshaw & Gkartzios 2016, Crawshaw 2015, Coombs 2015, Kester 2011, Schacter 2014, Vickery 2009, Jayne 2004, Miles and Paddison 2005, Plattner 1996), class and social structures (Crawshaw 2015, Schacter 2014, Sjöholm 2013, Housley 2006, Bourdieu 1997) and social agency and identity (Hodson 2016, Schacter 2014, Wilf 2014, Sjöholm 2013, Moeran 2011, Liep 2001, Plattner 1996, Gell 1998, Becker 1984). For example, anthropologist Gell (1998) rejected a range of practices that had been previously

used by anthropologists to analyse art (such as the iconographic and the aesthetic approach), describing them as being fundamentally non-anthropological. Instead, he applied a material culture focused framework to his proposed anthropological research framework, which embraced an observable and practical approach that was underpinned by the assumption that art objects have coherent biographies, and are imbued with social agency by various actors involved in their production and consumption. Whilst applying a different analytical framework and data field to his research on the production and consumption of art, Bourdieu (1997), like Gell, also examined the social elements at play in art in contemporary France, particularly in terms of analysing the way in which the culture of art was central to the production and maintenance of social identity, taste and a social class system.

The social experience of being an artist within the wider context of an 'art world' was introduced by sociologist Harold Becker who explored the way in which artists navigate their position in society by having 'intimate and extensive relations with the worlds from which they try to distinguish themselves' (Becker 1984: 36) and by adhering to a set of art world social conventions, which 'regulate the relations between artists and their audience, specifying the rights and obligations of both' (Ibid: 29). Following on from Becker, anthropologist Plattner (1996) conducted research on localized art markets that focused on the experience of practicing artists through exploring the relationships between artists, collectors, dealers and curators, and encompassed the everyday experience of making a living as an artist within the context of 1990's America. Housley's study of artists complements Plattner's in that he also explored the wider social contexts of art practice and positioned his informants, practicing artists, as social and cultural agents that operate skilfully within a specific field of social relations, and social spaces, that are characterised by a web of interconnected cultural and social elements. (Housley 2006:4)

The scope of the body of anthropological research into the everyday practices and experiences of artists has also extended into explorations of the spaces that artists inhabit, such as studios and exhibition spaces. These spaces are positioned as being central to the practice of being an artist, and are argued to have a key role in the development and maintenance of artists' identities, relationships and professional profiles. Sjöholm, for example, positions the studio as an active environment that has the capacity to 'provoke reflection and thinking...[and] material engagement and enchantment.' (Sjöholm 2013:2) Pigrum (2007) also considers the studio to be a specific spatial context that is continuously

recreated through physical movement and the conscious placement and utilisation of tools, materials and other objects within the space. More general anthropological concepts relating to space, that see it as being complex, transactional and infused with the potential for the exertion of social agency, have also informed the work undertaken within this thesis, particularly in relation to the art studio and exhibition spaces. In this capacity, the production, reinvention, denial or appropriation of history and other socially and culturally normalized practices and understanding, are raised and explored in terms of their contribution to the way in which spaces are constructed, utilized and understood. (see Featherstone and Lash (eds.) 1999, Soja (ed.) 2000, and Low and Lawrence-Zuniga (eds.) 2003)

The physical experience of the artist working within a space, and interacting with objects and materials, forms an important element in the anthropological literature on art. Within this field the way in which the body learns to move as an artist, and to use tools and materials in discipline specific ways, is a key focus. The journey from novice to experienced practitioner focuses on the way in which the mind and the body come together in a very conscious manner at first, but eventually work in what feels like a natural and automatic manner after many hours of practice. O'Connor described the learning process she underwent to become a glassblower as one in which she eventually worked with 'a subsidiary awareness of the glass blowpipe' (2007:129). Anthropologists of art, who have an interest in the fields of the body, intersubjectivity and learning, have explored the role of educational institutions, sub-cultures, gender and class as having an impact on the way in which the utilisation of the body is experienced and understood. Wilf, for example describes the education process as that which attempts to induct the novice into a social and cultural practice, as much as a technical or conceptual one. Important elements of this include modelling the way in which language is used, clothes are worn, bodies are held, and materials, tools and techniques are chosen and applied. (Wilf 2014:402). Within this context there is a growing consensus amongst anthropologists that a culture of embodied learning and practice influences artists' development of a sense of belonging to the art world, including contributing to the way in which they are perceived by other art world members as legitimate, disciplined and skilful art practitioners. (see Wilf 2014, Atkinson 2013, Ivinson 2012, O'Connor 2007) The role of creativity within the arts is also addressed through exploring the way in which creativity is developed and transmitted to artists through embodied education (as discussed by Sabeti 2015, Schacter 2014, Burton 2009, Parezzo 2006). Research into creativity has, additionally, focused on the experience and

understanding of artists in relation to the way in which their own creativity impacts on their practices and products (see Wilf 2014, Moeran 2011, Liep 2001, Plattner 1996, Becker 1984). The consensus of the research in this field is that creativity within the arts is a highly valued attribute that, while being seen by people as being an innate characteristic, is actually positioned by researchers as being an attribute that is constructed and developed through social and pedagogical means and practice.

Much of the most recent work in the anthropology of contemporary art focuses on the role of art in community and economic development (Crawshaw & Gkartzios 2016, Crawshaw 2015, Coombs 2015, Kester 2011, Schacter 2014, Vickery 2009, Jayne 2004, Miles and Paddison 2005) and in exploring resistance. The work being undertaken in these fields spans both urban and rural locations, primarily within the British or European context. For example Crawshaw describes the way in which the arts policies of a rural town in England champions art as 'a tool for creating jobs, attracting visitors and supporting rural businesses' (Crawshaw 2015:134). She cites the work undertaken in the field that uncovers the breadth of 'communitarian purposes to which creativity can be put' beyond a profit-maximising activity for economic growth', which includes 'community transformations resulting from art-led practices, such as creating a sense of belonging...providing opportunities for social interaction critical for the wellbeing of rural communities...and solving community problems' (2015: 134). Coombs (2015) concurs with this position and, citing Kester (2011: 185), makes the point that there is a 'transformatory potential' of human consciousness through collaborative and collective art practices' and 'that collaborative art practices of this nature involves a compassionate recognition of difference' and the 'embrace of the intimate, the affective, the communicative and the ...innovative modes of social interaction based on design traces [that] help form a 'dual consciousness of both local and global implications and interconnections of a given site and situation' (Kester in Coombs 2015: 50). Conversely Schacter's work on graffiti in London raises a number of issues associated with 'the domestication, the neutralization of Street Art' (2014:162) through a drive for culture-led urban regeneration. Schacter positions the 'world-dominating gospel of the Creative City' as 'an almost total complicity with a globally domineering cultural policy in which the arts are reduced to a mere instrumental cog in the 'creative', 'regenerative' wheel' (2014:162). In this capacity, Schacter considers the position of artists, as social agents, to have a deeper function than simply meeting the needs of 'institutionalized Public Art entirely beholden to the strategic, acquisitive desires of the contemporary, neo-liberal city' (Ibid).

The research presented in this thesis contributes to the ongoing development of the concepts outlined above, in particular providing an Australian perspective to the anthropological enquiries into art and artists. Within this context, the conceptual framework and underpinning research that I have introduced so far form the basis of my thesis chapters into the life of artists in South Australia. It is within these chapters that the different social arenas, which are occupied in the course of the life and work of my informants, are more fully explored. The following section provides an overview of these chapters and aims to summarise the ways in which each chapter, and its key foci, contributes to an holistic understanding of artists as cultural and creative workers and facilitators.

1.4. THESIS OUTLINE

This thesis is made up of eight chapters, starting with this introduction and following with a methodology chapter. Chapter two - 'Methodology and Method' forms an important foundational chapter for the thesis, which contributes to developing an understanding of the relationship between my research questions, and the research methods I chose to utilise throughout this project. The nature of my project - that is working with a number of individual, sole practising artists - was key to my determination and design of the methods, processes and research participants I chose to employ. These choices also, subsequently, asserted their own influence on any modifications I made to the methods applied, and to the analytical processes I undertook. The core of the thesis is based on a presentation and analysis of data collected predominantly from the conduct of ethnographic fieldwork which, as a research method, has the capability to be highly responsive and flexible in meeting the needs of a range of research conditions, including for my own project's primary focus of working closely with individual artists who practiced alone within their studio spaces. Whilst 'Methodology and Method' provides an important discussion of the practical research methods that facilitated the conduct of the project, the more important focus that is articulated throughout the chapter relates to the way in which the idiosyncratic conditions of the project formed the basis for my initial research design, but also continued to guide my reflexive re-configuration of the project to achieve better data outcomes, ensure the maintenance of positive relationships, and manage my own ongoing wellbeing. The factors that emerged, which impacted my project, were many but included better understanding my role as instigator and coordinator of the project, which incorporated the way that my natural attributes and limitations, such as age and gender, impacted on the

research. These kinds of moderating factors are articulated as having an impact on the way in which I understood, and undertook, the research itself and, indeed, on the finished thesis. A key value of the 'Methodology and Method ' chapter, therefore, is to make explicit the underlying conceptual and practical considerations upon which my methods, data and arguments are built.

The five main chapters, starting with Chapter 3, 'Being an Artist', explore a number of key identified areas of an artist's life and work, which have been constructed as essays describing particular aspects of the areas as I had observed them during my fieldwork. Each chapter presents a focus on the way in which artists understand their role through highlighting, within the context of the particular chapter's focus, the key thematic considerations that emerged during my fieldwork. The chapters describe discrete parts of the professional and private lives of the artists I worked with, and have been written with reference to one another, where relevant, in order to support the presentation of an holistic narrative that paints a picture of what it is to be an artist in contemporary South Australia. Within this context the five thematic chapters, overall, provide an integrated narrative for understanding the self described social facilitation role of artists, as cultural and creative workers in contemporary Australian society.

Chapter Three - 'Being an Artist' focuses on how artists experience the process of becoming and being an artist, which is fundamental to the way in which they understand their professional and personal identities, and how they navigate themselves through their practices and relationships. The artists I worked with saw their practice as being an integration of, and sometimes a tension between, a 'calling' to be an artist, springing from their internal private understanding of themselves, and the need to fulfil the external social imperatives of this unique group. Within this context, 'Being an Artist' articulates the way in which my informants understood their establishment as artists as emerging from something that was described as an 'artistic imperative'. This imperative was said to compel new artists to want to communicate their world and their experiences through conceptualising and constructing the symbolic and material artefacts that we know as artworks. In alignment with this view, Plattner also found that the artists he worked with articulated a strong need to make art as 'an activity necessary for their survival as a human being.' (Plattner 1996:79) in addition to this imperative my informant artists also revealed a sense of obligation attached to their role as cultural and creative workers, which was characterised by the drive to provide a socially facilitative or therapeutic function, and in

which they saw themselves as fulfilling an implicit social contract. This social contract on the one hand can be seen to provide artists with a level of social latitude to explore controversial issues and live unconventional lifestyles but, on the other hand, also expects them to contribute to the processes of cultural renewal and maintenance through engaging with social activities and issues.

'Being an Artist' also positions the notion of talent as an essential attribute that artists see themselves possessing and applying in ways that support their technical development and their social and professional legitimacy. In this capacity, talent is conceptualised and explained from a personal and social perspective. These two perspectives are not considered to be mutually exclusive, however, and within this context they inform one another in various ways, including in terms of the ways in which talent is understood as a significant element that impacts on the professional success of artists. The artists I worked with also considered that their perceived possession of talent somehow obligated them to use their talent well, which highlights the presence of a moral element to the notion of talent. This moral element takes the form of an obligation to exercise discipline and hard work, in order to avoid 'wasting' talent through neglecting to develop it appropriately, and also expresses itself through talent's positioning as an ideal precursor to an artist's success. The notion of success and talent being linked was often seen as being quite fragile, however, and was considered by my informants to be easily corrupted by other factors, such as the ability to develop successful personal networks. Artists who saw themselves as having well developed and well utilised talent often propounded an explanatory framework for their limited professional success, which was predicated on a corruption of integrity and authenticity - articulated in terms of the notion of the 'sell out' - combined with a cult of personality, which was often couched in terms of the impact of an artist's level of personal charisma, and their skill in networking. The key elements of integrity and charisma were, therefore, cited as being important factors in an artist's success, which provided an explanation as to why legitimate artists did not always succeed.

Chapter 4 - 'Doing Art' frames the practice of art making as a socially focused and organised discipline that draws on structures of tradition, skill and knowledge, as a means through which artists can become legitimised within their profession. A key interconnecting focus of this chapter, that was present within all the discrete areas under discussion, was the importance of tradition and modelling in the practice of art making. This focus was

presented in terms of the value of learning to 'do art' through traditional embodied and practical means, using traditional techniques, materials and spaces.. The chapter explores art making practice and experience from the initial conceptualisation through to the making of the material object, including articulating the ways in which traditional or novel concepts, aesthetics, tools, techniques and materials are applied and experienced by the artists using them. 'Doing Art' focuses on three contributing factors that inform my positioning of art making practice as social and cultural work practice. In this capacity the chapter examines the social structures and practices associated with the learning of art making through embodied and disciplined teaching and practice, and the way in which the relationship between the tools and materials of art and the artist were understood and experienced.

'Doing Art' discusses the strong and essential role that education has in developing and structuring the technical skills and working methods of artists, particularly through undertaking studio art making practice, which was experienced by my informants as an embodied activity that contributed to the disciplining of artists' bodies. The embodied lessons learned within the educational experience had an ongoing impact on the relationship between the artist, the art materials and tools, and the artwork, and also extended to the development of creativity within the artist, which was seen as an attribute of core importance in the artist's work. In this context the chapter frames the notion of creativity as an essential element of the art making practice and of the identity and lifestyle of the artist. The value of creativity, as an adjunct to the education of an artist, was demonstrated through the presentation and explanation of ethnographic descriptions of their artistic concept development processes that preceded the physical manufacture of an artwork.

Chapter Five - 'Art Spaces' introduces the space in which artworks are made, providing an historical background of the traditions and popular imaginings associated with the studio, but focusing primarily on the examination of the studio as a social and cultural space. 'Art Spaces' applies a discussion of the social and cultural construction and uses of space to the specific arena of the artist's studio, but draws some parallels between other types of spaces, whilst maintaining a case for understanding the studio as a social arena that is influenced and shaped by the particular social role that artists occupy. Within this context the artist's

studio was described as a blended environment that requires the continuous negotiation of boundaries, both conceptual and physical, between the public/work and the private/domestic worlds of artists.

Section One of Art Spaces- 'The Working Studio' - articulates the way in which this place of work is conceptualized, created and experienced by artists, particularly in relation to the various workplace models that exist within a contemporary social context. A number of elements that are considered in 'The Working Studio' include the way in which choices were made regarding the construction and utilisation of the studio space, incorporating a discussion on the negotiation and creative manipulation of available space and resources to achieve something close to the artist's ideal model of a working art studio. Section Two - 'The Conceptual Space' - positions the spatial environment of the studio as one that represents the artist as an individual who operates within the historical and social context of the mainstream Australian art world, whilst also asserting their own personal social roles and perspectives through the conscious construction and utilisation of their workspace to meet their individual needs. The discussion that is presented in 'The Conceptual Space' also focuses on the wider social elements of the studio space, including on the way in which the artists provided themselves with a forum for their own social and political identities and agendas, and the way in which the studio functioned as a transformational space, where ideas were transformed into tangible artworks. Within this context the role of ephemeral 'artefacts' was also demonstrated to play a predominant role in the construction and operation of the studio space.

Chapter Six - 'Mediating Materiality' follows on from 'Art Spaces' by expanding the material focus on the studio, as meaningful place, to a focus on the artworks themselves as material objects of significant social and personal meaning. 'Mediating Materiality' contributes to the framing of the artist as social and cultural facilitator by demonstrating that a key role in producing material objects is a social one, through which the presentation of their artworks have the capacity to convey social meaning that may compel the viewer into engagement with social or cultural issues or ideas. The two primary questions that the chapter explores are the way in which the identity, agendas and social roles of artists are connected to, and facilitated by, the art objects they produce, and how the meaning that is attached to an artwork is manufactured, disseminated, negotiated and ensured. In answering these questions, the chapter applies a material culture studies focus, which is contextualised by a range of ethnographic material, in order to articulate my informant's

experience of making and presenting art that contributed to social dialogue and cultural knowledge and practice, and/or provided a vehicle for the expression of inner emotional worlds. In exploring the ways in which the identity, agendas and social roles of artists are connected to, and facilitated by, the art objects they produce, the chapter presents a range of ethnographic material describing specific artworks produced by my informants, and within this context the chapter articulates the often complex meanings behind them. Working from this concept, the chapter presents a range of material that focuses on the fluidity of meaning across artworks, and examines the means through which this complexity of interpretation is experienced, understood and managed by the artists featured in this discussion. Furthermore, the chapter explores the transformation that takes place in order for the raw materials of art to be turned into artworks, including outlining the key combined attributes of the artist that facilitated the achievement of this 'magic' process.

Chapter Seven - 'Exhibiting Legitimacy' focuses on the social relationships that artists engage in and how these relationships impact on their individual identities and their public role as artist. The chapter is primarily concerned with examining the way in which artists' social legitimacy within, and external to, the art world was developed and maintained. When discussing legitimacy within the context of artists, the chapter frames the concept as a social means through which artists are seen, and see themselves, as possessing the relevant type and level of status, skills, talent and knowledge required to become and remain a competent and successful member of the art world. The chapter makes the point that artists continuously engage with a broad range of people and organisations during the course of their practice, but offers the exhibition as one exemplar that effectively displays the breadth of social engagement that artists undertake, on an ongoing basis, with a range of art world participants. The chapter also positions the exhibition, with its enduring adherence to certain traditional practices, as an important forum for providing artists with an opportunity to deliver a successful performance that allows them, and the exhibition attendees, to display an intimate 'insider' knowledge of the practices of the art world. 'Exhibiting Legitimacy' provides an explanation of the key social relations that are played out within the context of the art exhibition, and places the artist at the centre of the event, in the role of legitimate, skilled, creative and knowledgeable host. Working from this framework, the chapter provides an introduction into the history and culture of art exhibitions, and discusses the concept of legitimacy within a social and anthropological context. The remainder of the chapter focuses on describing the stages of exhibition planning, conduct and post-event review, with a focus on articulating and exploring the

social relationships that occur within those stages, and the ways in which they impact on the legitimacy of the artist. The discussion, in this capacity, supports my argument that the roles and practices that are performed at the exhibition event work to uphold art world norms and practices, and also reflect a range of associated wider social practices and beliefs, including those relating to hierarchies of knowledge, reciprocity and meritocracy. In this capacity the chapter contributes to understanding the social processes that support the development and maintenance of the artistic legitimacy of art world participants, and of the roles and traditions that characterise the art world in Australia.

1.4. CONCLUSION

The artists I worked with, and studied, generously shared all parts of their lives with me, and in doing so, revealed a small yet diverse sample of the range of practices, beliefs and lifestyles that make up the personal and professional life of artists within the South Australian context. It is from this sample of informants, combined with the support of other anthropological and arts based research and resources, that I offer the comparisons, analyses and conclusions I have made in this thesis. My aim throughout is to provide a coherent and multifaceted account of artist's lives that demonstrates the unique, unconventional and culturally facilitative role they provide as cultural and creative workers within the cultural economy of South Australia.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

2.1. INTRODUCTION: THE PROJECT AND THE PEOPLE

This chapter provides an outline of my research project in terms of the field and participants I worked with, the methodology I applied, and the research methods I adopted. The chapter provides a methodological context upon which to consider my research methods and findings, and articulates the strategies I employed to support the achievement of my desired outcomes for the project. The chapter is also somewhat reflexive in its tone as I raise and discuss the way in which I, the novice human researcher who was planning, implementing and undertaking a completely unfamiliar (to me) type of project, navigated my way through the process. In this context I articulate the ways in which I went about identifying, assessing and applying a broad range of techniques, concepts and technologies, some of which had been passed on to me through disciplinary channels, and some of which had emerged or been devised in response to specific needs or issues.

As previously introduced, this research project is an exploration of the life, work and experience of artists within the context of the contemporary setting of South Australia in the mid-2000's. The project was conceived with a desire to explore, and expand the understanding of, the role and practice of artists as cultural and creative workers within the Australian context. My overall aim was to contribute to the existing body of anthropological research on contemporary art through providing an Australian perspective that focused on the experience of being an artist within that context.

The central players in my project were my research informants, a group which consisted of primary and secondary informants – all artists - and a range of other associated individuals and organisations, such as friends and family of artists, galleries, art services suppliers (framers etc), funding bodies, and community arts organisations. My primary and secondary informants were all visual artists working in South Australia, with the principal difference between their primary and secondary status being defined as the overall length of time that I collaborated with each individual. Whilst the potential field of informants was

large, given the popularity of taking up visual arts as a hobby for many people, I limited my field by choosing to work with people who identified as visual artists above any other category of work that they undertook, and who worked within their own studio space in a primarily sole practice style. The method for soliciting participants for my research project took the form of a 'cold calling' exercise in which I accessed the publicly available database of self proclaimed artists run by an SA based arts organisation (ArtsSA) and sent out a mass generic email, to approximately fifty artists, inviting them to participate in my research project. The primary informants that I sourced from this process worked with me in some form or other over the course of my three year, part-time, fieldwork period. I also had a number of secondary informants who worked with me for shorter periods of time and who, in all cases, elected to end their association with me as a result of feeling that they had committed too much time to my project. The artists I collaborated with during the course of my project worked in a range of different visual arts mediums, or combinations of mediums. These included painting and drawing, sculpture, ceramics, jewellery and photography. Most of the artists I worked with chose to utilize more than one artistic medium including, but by no means limited to, sculpture and painting, photography and painting, jewellery and sculpture, and sculpture and photography. Furthermore, those artists who worked primarily within a particular discipline often worked with a wide variety of areas within that medium. Examples of this include painting, where the artist might work in watercolours, oils or acrylics, or sculpture where a combination of metal casting, steel work and clay forming may be practiced. While there were many distinct differences in a range of areas to do with the artist's practices, including: the materials and methodologies used and the ways in which they were utilised, the subjects portrayed or depicted, and the level of success experienced by the artists, there were also some distinct similarities in the ways the artists described the motivations behind, and meanings of, their practice. These motivations and meanings predominantly centred around a number of key concerns or elements associated with their art practice. In no particular order these are: autonomy, freedom and uniqueness, creativity, talent and skill, physical, emotional and psychological expression and healing, integrity and authenticity, expression of social concerns or interests, professional and social relationships, and public perceptions and recognition.

I had anticipated that undertaking ethnographic research with a group of sole practitioner artists would present some challenges for me. This was due to the fact that they predominantly worked out of their private domestic spaces, were situated in a disparate set

of geographic locations, and had work schedules and activities that were not always consistent, predictable, or replicable if I missed something when I wasn't around. This proved to be an accurate assumption and meant that achieving regular contact was, at times, difficult to maintain as they often worked in a rather sporadic manner in their own studio spaces. This difficulty was further complicated by my part-time study status which meant I may not have always been available when things were happening with artists. With these complexities in mind as being a potentially significant block to the successful conduct of my fieldwork, I felt it was important to discuss the issues and negotiate and develop strategies that would work in meeting the needs of all participants. The resultant strategy that I implemented, in order to successfully collaborate with this diverse cohort of informants, was to adopt a somewhat layered approach to the conduct of my research over what became a 3 year period. This meant that I generally requested a more intense 3 month period of contact with the artist in the initial stages of their participation, and then this would taper off after that to more periodic contact. The way this looked in practice was that in the first 12 months of my project I made contact with all the 12 primary project participants, including conducting initial meetings, scoping out their needs and negotiating access to their studio spaces, and conducting some preliminary interviews about their practice. After this preliminary contact, and in consideration of a negotiated timeline, I generally only initiated more intense contact with them at about a rate of 3 artists at a time. Intense contact, within the parameters of a part-time research project, equated to spending about a day a week with each participant. This contact was then reduced to contact as needed to attend exhibitions, view specific activities (such as specific technical undertakings, review of a body of work, framing or other preparations, and other collaborations or the like), or to catch up for a general debrief of the missed time period if none of those more significant happenings had occurred during the no-contact timeframe. This approach worked quite well in terms of addressing some of the key issues that I anticipated may become inhibiting factors in the collection of relevant data. Additionally, during the course of my project I was also concerned with becoming an interfering presence to my informants when they were highly absorbed in working on their artworks. I found that the intense first 3 month period (even at only one day a week) provided me with an opportunity to develop a more intimate relationship with the artist, but was not often enough for me to be seen as being an interfering presence in their work life. A few of the artists commented on this themselves and said that they enjoyed having me around one day a week, but they were glad it wasn't more because they found it somewhat challenging to have a constant presence in their usually solitary work spaces. This approach, coupled with

a 'call me if something happens' strategy, meant that I was able to observe and participate in a broad cross section of activities undertaken by the artists I worked with, whilst also successfully navigating around the multitude of logistical complexities and participant reservations that I encountered.

The demographic makeup of my small group of principal research participants was something that I considered to be important in order to maintain the balance and representativeness in my project. In this capacity, my primary and secondary research participants consisted of seven males and nine females, ranging in age from 29 to 68 years of age, but with the majority of the people I worked with fitting in to the 35-55 year old category. All except for two of my informants were born in Australia, and the two that were born overseas came from English speaking countries that have similar social and cultural conditions as Australia. Additionally, only two of the artists I worked with had received no formal arts education of any kind, although one of those had undertaken formal technical training in the field of metal fabrication and technical engineering, which was undertaken to support his metal sculpture aims. In reflecting on my informant cohort, I considered that their demographic makeup was somewhat limited in terms of their ages, socio-economic status, ethnicity and educational background. This was somewhat of a concern for me as I felt that this deficit may have impacted on the accuracy of the information I was gathering, and whether it was, in fact, representative of the general artist population in South Australia. As it turns out, my cohort was somewhat limited, but generally fairly accurate in terms of the statistical demographic data on that is available on artists in Australia. Throsby and Zednick (2010:21) cite 2009 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures, which states that there are slightly more females than males involved in practicing visual arts in Australia (Ibid:22), and that the average age for a middle career practising visual artist is 50 years, with most artists beginning their careers at around age 35 (Ibid:21). Additionally, the figures state that the significant majority of artists in Australia were born in Australia, are from English speaking backgrounds (Ibid:23) and have undertaken some kind of formal arts education before embarking on their careers (Ibid:26).

Whilst I did not actively seek specific figures regarding participant's income, quite a bit of engagement was undertaken with regard to the livelihoods of my informants. The majority (all but one) of my participant's relied on sources of income other than that gleaned from their art practice. This correlates with statistics from across Australia, which states that approximately half of the income derived by artists comes from sources other than their

primary creative occupation (Throsby and Zednick 2010:45). The kinds of work that my artist participants undertook in addition to their art practice included teaching, public service, cleaning, art education and art therapy. In addition, a number of the artists I worked with supplemented their art income with other sources of income such as pensions, investment funds or with the support of their employed partners. The need to work at other jobs was cited as one of the factors that prevented prospective participants from joining my research project. It was also considered to be a factor in the early withdrawal of two artists from the project.

Overall, I considered that, while my principal informant cohort was small, and the logistical complexities of work with that cohort rather substantial, the strategies that I put in place to support the mitigation of the aforementioned factors appeared to have the desired effect and provided me with a robust and relatively diverse range of information upon which to draw my analysis.

2.2. METHODOLOGY

2.2.1. METHODOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The anthropological research methodology that was applied during my project demonstrates some obvious diversions from what would be considered a ‘classical’ anthropological research undertaking. These diversions include the choice of my informants, who were predominantly individual artists working alone within their discrete studio spaces, rather than a cohesive group or community that one might encounter when doing anthropology. Additionally the method of doing ethnography that I adopted, which was conducting participant observation and fieldwork on a part-time basis, could also be considered to be somewhat divergent from the immersed style of research undertaken by anthropologists in more traditional settings. I argue, however, that my research and this thesis is solidly based within the field of anthropology, and has a clear ethnographic foundation that is evident in the detailed accounts of the lives and experiences of my informants, data for which I collected over a long period of intimate and diverse engagement with these individuals.

The central method to any anthropological enquiry is that of ethnographic fieldwork, which incorporates the development of close relationships with informants through the conduct of participant observation. Ethnography is an essentially human pursuit, in that it works from

the basis of being a flexible and intimate research methodology that allows humans to do what they naturally desire to do...that is to socialise and bond with other humans. When we come from a place of wanting to know about, and share with, other people, then the kind of information that is gleaned from such interactions has a significantly different quality to that which is collected through more formal processes such as interviews or surveys. Ortner (1984:143) describes ethnographic fieldwork as 'the attempt to view other systems from the ground level' and citing it as a unique method of note she states that fieldwork is 'perhaps the only basis of Anthropology's distinctive contribution to the human sciences. It is our capacity, largely developed in fieldwork, to take the perspective of the folks on the shore, that allows us to learn anything at all, even in our own culture, beyond what we already know' (Ibid). Moreover, she asserts that 'it is our location 'on the ground' that puts us in a position to see people not simply as passive reactors to, or enactors of, some 'system', but as active agents and subjects in their own history'(Ibid).

The nature of contemporary ethnographic research methods, while always based on the fundamental ideal of developing and maintaining deep and long-term relationships with informants, is broad and flexible and is increasingly influenced by the changing nature of work and study in the modern world. In this capacity research approaches can include the strictly classical style, which is based on the researcher situating themselves in a discrete community or social group and (hopefully) assuming the role of community member (as was the ideal set out in Malinowski's seminal work). Increasingly, however, researchers are adopting more disparate and multi-method based studies that may incorporate: working within one's own community, in urban, sub-urban or rural environments; working with unusual or disparate research participants; researching part time or across a range of sites, and; utilising a wider range of data collection and recording tools and methods. The new and broad range of styles, tools, methods and theoretical considerations and perspectives have emerged as sites of significant attention for, and remain the subject of, much attention both within and external to the anthropological community (see Flinn 1998, Gupta and Ferguson 1997, Marcus 1995, Ortner 1984). These discussions and perspectives, along with a number of unavoidable material conditions related to my site and subjects, informed and supported the choices I made with regard to the research style and practice I adopted. It is within this continually emerging and changing practice of anthropological enquiry that I consider my own project to be situated.

A particular diversion from the 'classical' research method was in my adoption of a part-time working regimen. I considered this less conventional approach to be within the acceptable bounds of the ethnographic ideal of developing and maintaining intimate research relationships because I prioritised a focus on the maintenance of our collaborations through making myself available to my informants on a very short notice basis. This high level of availability and flexibility allowed me to maintain close working relationships that continued to develop in depth over time. Whilst part-time PhD's in anthropology are becoming more common, there is still a sense within the discipline that the 'right' way to do fieldwork is to engage in a highly immersive participant observation experience that is all encompassing, and in which the world of the informants becomes, in a sense, the world of the researcher. The status that this kind of 'rite of passage' fieldwork confers on the researcher is, I contend, both strongly and positively internalised by the researcher themselves, but also both explicitly and implicitly encouraged from within the discipline and from its practitioners. There is a sense that to undertake an alternative path in the conduct of field research is to lose some of its legitimacy as a distinct and unique research approach. Marcus discusses the cultural norms attached to the anthropological method in terms of their potential to inhibit the acceptance of new or more flexible research styles, stating that 'the conduct and outcome of fieldwork are less a matter of training in method, or specific techniques of inquiry and reporting, than of participating in a culture of craftsmanship that anthropologists embrace' (Marcus 2009:3). Marcus explicates this notion further by asserting that this craftsmanship is encouraged and reproduced through 'mentorship...expectations and strong shared images of ideal practice...exemplary performance...and an aesthetics of evaluation of results...which...is important for the solidarity of a profession that understands itself as a craft and prides itself on a certain mystique of practice' (Ibid). The idea of professional craftsmanship has such strong positive and emotive connotations but Marcus makes the point that 'these aspects both exert a highly restrictive influence on the range of discourses that anthropologists can have about their distinctive research process' (Ibid).

This same sense of compromising the legitimacy of the fieldwork experience can, in some sense, also be applied to the practice of doing fieldwork within one's home culture. While this has become a more common practice within anthropology in the last few decades, the traditional approach of taking up research in a foreign culture still maintains its high level of appeal and relevancy within the discipline. Caputo considers that 'holding past examples of 'exotic' fieldwork as norms against which to compare the authenticity and value of

contemporary research efforts powerfully affords a way for the discipline to differentiate between what are 'real' fields, 'real' fieldwork and, in turn, 'real' anthropology'. (Caputo 2000:22). This notion of what constitutes 'real fieldwork' is an issue that spans a number of contemporary anthropological research practices (as also discussed in relation to part-time study previously) and there is considerable scope to further explore the potential for the continual development of improved methods to support a variety of new and innovative practices (see Marcus 2009). In relation to the 'home field', Norman asserts that the 'conditions and consequences of doing fieldwork 'at home'...have to do with, for example, nearness and accessibility, time-span, language and research costs...For many Anthropologists, conducting fieldwork 'at home' means that it can be practically and economically easy to come and go to the field. Such closeness makes it possible to keep fieldwork going over a long period of time, combining it with other work and family-related commitments.' (Norman 2000:122) This was my primary reason for choosing to conduct fieldwork in my home town, and my experience very much aligns with Norman's assertion regarding some of the practical complexities of working in this kind of field site: 'Working at home can make the anthropologist appear (and feel) like 'one of us' who is expected to share certain cultural values and social experiences, to 'know', or alternatively the anthropologist can be seen as different, a representative of the 'majority' and the powerful who might then be expected to have political or economic influence.' (Ibid:123) At various times during the conduct of my research I found myself subject to such assumptions, both from the individuals I worked with, and from my own interpretations and reactions to what was happening around me. The practice of reflexivity regarding the impact of one's own cultural normalised understandings of the world is, therefore, critical to maintaining that sense of 'strangeness' when working within a culturally familiar environment. The desire to develop an ongoing closeness with one's research informants whilst maintaining a sense of 'strangeness' with the field in which the research is being conducted sounds somewhat at odds with one another initially. However, I considered the simultaneous cultivation of these two states to be an essential part of doing fieldwork within my home town because it provided me with the opportunity to see the world of my participants with fresh eyes that led to the emergence of new insights into practices I may have previously taken for granted.

2.2.2. RESEARCH CONTEXT, PLANNING AND ISSUES

The research questions that I originally anticipated being applicable to this project were related to the notion of gaining a better understanding of the ways in which the artist participates with, and lives and works in, a contemporary western social context such as ours. The general research problem that I wished to explore in this capacity was one of gaining deeper insight into how artists themselves understand and play out their role as artist, both in their private and public lives. This included exploring how they see their role as being structured within society and how that structure impacts on the way they work, construct their spaces, conduct relationships and produce and present their art objects.

My initial conceptualisation of the problem led to a number of assumptions regarding the way in which this played out, including the assumption that an inherent element of the practice of art making was to express a significant focus on the role of material culture, symbolism and space in society. In this capacity, I made the assumption that artists, as members of a specific culture, were subject to understanding and expressing the world in the same broad way that all other members of that culture were, but that the difference with artists was that they made a work practice out of the skillful application of material and symbolic elements, and shared social meaning, in order to deliver specific social and aesthetic outcomes of varying types. These questions continued to remain highly relevant during the course of my fieldwork, and as I have undertaken the analysis and presentation of my research data within this thesis.

In addition to these aforementioned preconceived considerations, the way in which the social role of artist is internalised and expressed by the artist, in many aspects of their work and life, became another key area of interest that integrated closely with those other considerations, but was, in some way a little more difficult to tease out. This, I believe, is because the modes of expression, whilst having what I interpreted as similar motivating origins, were often quite different in the way they presented. The notion of agency and identity also play a significant role in understanding the way in which social constructions around the phenomena 'artist' interplays with the external expression of these constructions. In this capacity, the two become intertwined to reveal the scope of the forms that can be produced within the relatively normalised social parameters of what it is to be an artist in contemporary Australia. This interplay and scope becomes somewhat more clear in the analysis of the various discrete elements of the artist's world that I focus on in this thesis, the aim of which is to bring out some of the core social foundation of the various personal

and professional expressions being produced. My explorations in this capacity also included a strong focus on the way in which the material culture was appropriated and applied by the artists I worked with. My initial assertion was, that by looking at the way that material culture was used by artists, it would be possible to make some assumptions, more generally, about the current and emerging ways in which societies and their members also appropriate objects and symbols. These initial guiding concerns were an important element in facilitating the planning and conduct of my fieldwork as it provided me with a focus for the project that was based on my own previous study and practice as an artist, something I could relate to, but it also supported my conception of the project was one that was achievable through identifying very concrete areas that had the potential to be explored in a variety of ways. I did, however, always aim to take a flexible perspective, in terms of what I would find, as suggested for an interative/inductive approach to research. In this approach the 'researcher should enter into an ongoing simultaneous process of deduction and induction, of theory building, testing and rebuilding...iterative implies both a spiral and a straight line, a loop and a tail, inductive implies as open a mind as possible, allowing the data to speak for themselves as much as possible' (O'Reilly 2005:27). This approach came quite naturally to me as the conduct of fieldwork with artists, who often had rather unstructured work schedules, was for me very much a practice in being flexible to the changing circumstances.

In conceiving of, and planning, my project I had been aware of the potential for there to be more logistical, rather than ethical, concerns associated with the conduct of fieldwork. The participants and field I had chosen to work in would have to be considered rather benign in terms of the gamut of potential ethnographic field sites across the globe. I was working with an all adult, relatively well educated and skilled cohort of participants, and operating in a variety of very safe locales within my home town, which is a capital city in Australia, and which I know well. Whilst ethical considerations did play a part in the granting of access to funding and support for conducting a research project, I anticipated that my project would be relatively low risk. The potential issues that I anticipated may have arisen as a result of the research, were primarily related to the unequal power relations and dynamics that could potentially have existed between myself, as researcher and my research participants. My primary concern at the outset of my project was to ensure that all my research participants had been provided with the appropriate information they required in order to make informed choices about their involvement in the research. My aim was to ensure the informed consent of my participants in terms of their understanding of what the

research project involved, including the impact that their participation may have on themselves and other participants, that their participation in the project was voluntary and that they were free, at any time, to withdraw from the project, either partially or entirely. In this capacity I planned to present the project in a manner that provided full disclosure and transparency in relation to the projected outcomes of the research and the kind of information I was interested in gathering. In practice I found that most participants asked few questions at the beginning of the project, but became more interested in various elements of the research as they came to know me better and our conversations naturally reached a deeper level. Initially, most participants were concerned with the logistics of the project, in terms of how much time they would be committing to, and what kinds of activities would I be interested in seeing. As the research progressed participants would often ask about whether specific activities or practices were of interest to me, or what I made of them from an anthropological perspective.²

Coming from the objective of maintaining an open and informed relationship with my informants, I was aware of the possibility that they may, at times, be reticent to voice concerns about the research, or their part in it, and may also not feel able to refuse to participate in certain areas of the research, such as answering certain kinds of questions or agreeing to particular requests for access to information or sites. I consider myself to be a particularly sensitive individual, but even so, I endeavoured to work in a manner that would ensure my participants felt minimal pressure from me to do anything they were not comfortable with. In practice this involved a lot of consultation to explain what I wanted to know (or see) and to gain an affirmative response that appeared to be elicited without reservation. This approach had some limitations, as I often found myself being much more passive and reticent in my expression of my needs than I may have been in other circumstances. I suspect that this annoyed some of my participants and may have led to the ending of working relationships in some cases.

² For example, one day when visiting married couple Barrie and Christina (both practicing artists) at their home in which they both had studios, Barrie was showing me his music collection and discussing the merits of different types of music as an accompaniment to painting. We spent some time going through his collection during which time he was interested to know if I considered what we were doing a waste of my time in terms of what data I really wanted to collect. Discussions on the nature of anthropological investigations and concerns ensued, which presented an opportunity for both of us to share information and develop an understanding of the interactions we were having.

2.3. METHOD

2.3.1. THE CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCHER

The research approach I adopted was particularly suited to the unique conditions that presented themselves as being distinct and inherent elements of my research project. These related to the relatively unstructured way that artists undertake their work, and to the conditions I set myself as a researcher. As a mature-aged student and a single parent working part-time in a consultancy role, I elected to undertake my PhD on a part-time basis in order to more effectively fit in all the responsibilities that I had assumed. I also wished to ensure the continuity of my daughter's education in her final high school years, which meant that I chose to conduct my fieldwork in my home town of Adelaide, South Australia. Additionally, as my project involved working with practising artists, who usually work in isolation, I was very often conducting my research with individuals in their own personal studios. In fitting all of these pieces together, there were a number of complexities that I anticipated, and some that I did not, that arose from the choices I made in that regard. These complexities intersected at many points along the way, but will, for the most part, be discussed separately in terms of the three key points of distinction in my fieldwork - namely the conduct of fieldwork on a part-time basis, in my home community and with individuals rather than a group.

My choice to undertake my PhD on a part time basis came about as a result of making a choice regarding the balancing of a number of competing priorities in my life, including ensuring the continuing relevance of my existing professional skills that I felt may have been eroded should I withdraw myself from that arena for any significant period of time. Whilst my own part time study status is part of a growing trend in higher degrees across Australia, there are a number of issues of that I experienced, such as loss of connection, maintenance of interest and momentum, and a general lack of time and resources, that made studying in this mode difficult. ³ Doing part-time fieldwork in a way that would be

³ Recent research on the Australian PhD experience supports my perspective that '[a] growing proportion of students [are] spending at least part of their course working part-time and...that many students are starting their PhD courses at a later age...A student with family and non-university work commitments will find it more difficult to become part of a broader academic community and this can have implications for the kind and level of academic support they will seek from the university. Some research students find that far from conducting research as part of a broader peer community, they feel isolated, lacking the support of an environment that promotes creativity through the continual free exchange and testing of ideas, methods and experimental techniques.

Footnote continued on next page.

manageable, and meet the needs and objectives of the project, required some consideration of the logistics and potential issues. I anticipated that I would take double the duration of a normal fieldwork stint, which meant that I was likely to be in the field for two years or more. As a reflection of the changing nature of study in a contemporary western setting such as Australia, the desire to conduct fieldwork on a part-time basis caused no problems from the point of view of the academic institution in which I was based, which like all other similar universities has a specific part-time status, and associated policies, for higher degree students. In this capacity I was, with relatively minor difficulty, able to comply with all of the relevant stipulated requirements regarding the project development and planning stages of my project. The part-time fieldwork and thesis write-up stages, however, presented me with a number of issues, some of which were not really adequately resolved during the course of my project, but rather, were just tolerated or accounted for. The first of these issues related to problems with maintaining contact, both with the participants in my project, and with the university and my student colleagues and supervisors. I have already provided some discussion on the complexities associated with maintaining adequate contact with my research participants in relation to a number of competing factors, including their unconventional working styles, the importance of not being an interfering or overbearing presence in their life, and the need to balance my own part-time study status with informant's work and domestic life responsibilities. My strategies for dealing with the logistics of meeting up with my informants under these conditions seemed to work quite well overall. However, I believe that it was more difficult to obtain and maintain a level of intimacy that I required in order to effectively underpin the achievement of successful fieldwork outcomes in terms of the depth of the information and data gathered. It is important to note, however, that the level of intimacy I desired to achieve was easier to elicit with some informants than with others, and that this was likely to be mostly as a consequence of our personalities working well together. It is, therefore, somewhat difficult

Most of their day to day interactions may be with people who do not really understand what the research student is trying to achieve, why, or the personal sacrifices this can involve.' (The Group of Eight 2013:15)

The paper cites the 2010 National Research Student Survey, which found that 'more than 40 per cent of respondents felt that they had never really belonged in their department and almost 25 per cent agreed with the statement that they felt lonely and isolated in their studies. One factor contributing to this may be that 30 per cent of research students said '... they primarily undertake their study for their research degree at home' and over 5 per cent identified their main study location as 'at work outside the university.' (The Group of Eight 2013:31).

to definitively say that the lack of intense contact was the cause of the perceived deficits in the management of those relationships.

There were also a range of other issues that arose for me in terms of my student experience as a part-time postgraduate candidate. The challenges of negotiating and maintaining a healthy life balance is not an easy area for any student to negotiate, particularly those with work and family responsibilities. The issues that are common in this capacity include having to time manage employment and study commitments in order to continue to achieve goals and timelines, and having to manage a range of domestic responsibilities, including caring for children and/or elderly parents. I also faced these same challenges and additionally, as a part-time student, faced a number of problems that arose in terms of maintaining adequate connection with my academic colleagues and discipline. My challenges in this area related mostly to a sense that I was in danger of becoming too focused on just 'getting through' the project so I could move on with my life, as opposed to focusing on engaging with, and sharing, the interesting social and theoretical questions that my project raised. A further concern on my part was the lack of momentum that led to a longer than usual mid-research burnout period, which required significant input and encouragement from external forces in order for it to be managed effectively.

2.3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND CONDUCT

There were a number of factors that were taken into account during the initial conceptualisation and development phase of a research design model for my project. Some of these factors were immutable, such as the conduct of participant observation as a key method for the collection of data within an anthropological research project, and others were a reflection of the unique nature of my field sites and project participants.

The key method I utilised for the research project, and which is considered to be standard practice for all contemporary anthropological studies, is that of the conduct of ethnographic fieldwork, and the undertaking of participant observation activities. In undertaking this kind of research, I generally subscribed to the practice of a process described by O'Reilly as having the following minimum attributes:

[Ethnography]...is iterative/inductive research (that evolves in design through the study), drawing on a family of methods, involving direct sustained contact with human agents, within the context of their daily lives (and cultures), watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions, and producing a richly written account that respects the

irreducibility of human experience, that acknowledges the role of theory as well as the researcher's own role and views humans as part object/part subject.

(Oreilly 2005:3)

The flexible and adapted application of these broad methods and processes, to align with the specific conditions and requirements of my project, was what constituted the primary focus of my research activities. Whilst it is an expectation that the anthropological dissertation will be based on the independently collected ethnographic data of the researcher, this is not the only reason why a researcher would choose to conduct research in this way. I believe that the potential value of this approach for achieving high quality qualitative research and data outcomes is significant, and in this capacity, ethnography has been demonstrated to produce a range of unique and quality results that may not be available through the utilisation of other social research methods (see Ortner 1984:143 for a discussion of the merits of ethnography as a unique anthropological method).

Working primarily with the participant observation methodology in a number of forms, and operating with a focus on the previously cited iterative-inductive ethnographic research approach (O'Reilly 2005), highlighted for me the value of adopting this ongoing and flexible focus on the design and management of my research project. This approach assumes the researcher has some preconceived notions relating to the theoretical and methodological content and outcomes of the research, which I did. These notions, however, continued to remain flexible in order to ensure that the project remained responsive to the reality of the research situation and the data as it presented itself during the course of the project and in the analysis and write-up stages. In utilising this approach I had a strong focus on remaining responsive to the possibilities and opportunities as they presented themselves in the field, whilst continuing to assume a broad focus on the social role of the artist, which constituted my primary research focus and interest. This approach was supplemented with a range of other research methods, as required, including the utilisation of prepared questions for interview, the collection of demographic and social data, and the conduct of discourse analysis of exhibition reviews, advertisements, artist's statements and other relevant materials. Using all of these particular tools as they were deemed appropriate provided me with the flexibility to adapt to what I determined to be my specific information needs as they arose during the course of my research.

A key part of the design of my project was to incorporate the conduct of a significant proportion of my ethnographic fieldwork on what is essentially a sole practice, in order to

more clearly understand the social relevance of that practice. While the conduct of fieldwork with artists practicing alone in their studios accounted for approximately 70% of my overall fieldwork load, the other components of my fieldwork included attending exhibitions, visiting with artists wider social groups, and spending time within associated community organisations and service providers. The conduct of ethnography in the studios of the artists I worked with turned out to be much more of a social, rather than isolated, experience than I first imagined it would be. Additionally, as most studios were situated in the homes of my informants, it also provided me with a high level of insight into the way domestic environments express the agency of the artist and reflect the wider social values of the culture in which they are situated. ⁴While there have always been strong cultural forces at work within the home environment, the spatial organization of the environment and the kinds of material culture contained within, the incursion of relentless external cultural forces in the form of media such as television and the internet have created a more complex environment. This has happened through their ability to 'bring the world' into the private space of the home in a powerful sensory experience which imparts strong discursive messages about the cultural norms of the home society (Dant 1999, Attfield 2000, Ling and Thrane 2002, Hirsch and Silverstone 1992). This was evident in the homes of the artists I worked with and in a sense rendered the domestic and work spaces of the homes into social spaces that were seen as places to maintain the sense of personal identity as well as to facilitate the conception and construction of objects that were designed to move from the domestic environment into the social world of the gallery or market. What I discovered, therefore, was that although there were significant periods of simply working one to one with my artists, there was always a strong sense of, and appreciation for, the social world outside of the studio, and that world strongly influenced and shaped the meaning and significance of the artist's spaces, practices and artworks.

⁴ The discipline of anthropology has, in the past, focused predominantly on the home within the context of traditional, non-industrial, societies. The study of the home and its material culture within a contemporary western framework, however, is still a fairly new area of endeavour for anthropologists. This is mainly because the home has usually been a private arena, accessible only to kin and invited guests, making it both a difficult and sensitive space for social researchers to access. Recent research, however, takes the private homes of industrialised societies as their central focus and thereby indicate the growing interest in this field, which, while being significant to anthropology, has also become an important arena of study to a range of socially orientated inquisitive disciplines (Birdwell- Pheasant and Lawrence- Zuniga 1999, Miller 2001, Tilley et al (eds.) 2004).

The other issue is that I could really never be sure that I was getting the full and unreserved consent of my informants. This may be an unavoidable consequence of working in a rather informal research environment where there is still a researcher/subject power dynamic in play. I felt that the most effective means to address this issue in an holistic manner was by working to establish and maintain trusting relationships with my research participants, which I believed would support them to feel comfortable enough with me to be able to raise issues of concern. This meant entering into more of a sharing relationship, in which I also divulged much of my personal self to those I was working with. Another approach I adopted in relation to the mitigation of the aforesaid power dynamic was to ensure that reciprocity remained a feature of my relationship with my informants. I aimed to ensure that involvement in my research was not entirely one sided for my participants by providing practical support and contribution to their work, where possible and welcome. This included providing transport to various locations, cooking meals, helping to set up events such as exhibitions and open houses, and transporting artworks to and from framers or printers. I was also very often utilised as a sounding board for the evaluation of artworks in preparation for the consideration and organisation of exhibition spaces, for the interpretation of reviews or audience reception, and more generally for providing an ear for personal issues. It was, I considered, very important to be able to maintain a considerable level of flexibility in my collaborations with the people I worked with, and working within this broad approach provided me with a chance to take advantage of a variety of opportunities as they arose.

An area that I found difficult to navigate within the context of my own specific research project, was that of informant confidentiality. It is commonplace within ethnography to ensure that all information and data that may identify the researcher's informants is modified in a manner that does not affect the information, or removed (AAS 2010:Section 3.2), and this was an undertaking I committed to in principle both before, and for the duration of, my field research. I considered, however, that it would be almost impossible to be able to keep all identifying data out of my thesis, as much of the ethnography that I used came from the recording of very specific events and objects that have been in the public sphere, and have been recorded or evaluated within and external to that sphere, which would render them and their maker easily identifiable. All of the artists I worked with had no problem with me using their real identities, with the proviso that I would not divulge any sensitive personal information that may arise during the course of our interactions. In fact, most found the notion of needing to maintain confidentiality as strange given the public

nature of art.⁵ Despite this general lack of concern over confidentiality, in collaboration with the individuals I worked with, we did come to determine the general parameters around what was an acceptable level of anonymity, which included maintaining pseudonyms in cases where sensitive personal matters were being addressed. Overall, in my assessment of the level of confidentiality I was able to maintain in relation to my participants, I achieved good alignment with the requirements of the Code, and felt that my informants were also comfortable with the level that was provided on their behalf.

2.3.3. DATA COLLECTION, PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS

In order to collect a range of data that would allow me to have a wide contextual understanding of what it is to be an artist in Australia, I undertook participant observation, interviews and other types of research in a range field sites that were indicated by my artists as being relevant to their work and social lives. The sites I worked in during my fieldwork stage, included artist's studio spaces, their homes, art galleries (both during exhibition openings and at other times), a hospital, an art therapy practice, the premises of two community art groups, and social gatherings at cafes and bars. I also undertook studies of websites, online artist's forums and galleries that my informants had either participated in, or mentioned as being of relevance. The data that I collected during the course of my fieldwork, therefore, could be categorised into five different types as follows: 1. written field notes, 2. audio recordings, 3. visual records, including sketches, photographs and video, 4. transcriptions and recordings of online blogs, forums, galleries and exhibitions and, 5. archival research material, including artist information, exhibition advertisements and reviews, statistical information, and historical resources such as newspaper articles. The wide range of data that I collected did not always have a direct connection with my research participants or their work, but often provided me with a contextual underpinning of the concerns, issues, methods and practices of their profession on a wider scale, including of the communities and supporting bodies they engaged with, and of the historical bases of many commonly held understandings or practices.

⁵ Terrio found the same dismissal of the need for blanket privacy in the artisan chocolatiers she worked with: 'During my fieldwork chocolatiers were sometimes careful to distinguish between data I could and could not use precisely because most wanted me to use their real names and to promote both the craft and their businesses. My attempts to protect their anonymity both puzzled and annoyed them'(1998:9).

As previously discussed, the majority of my time was spent conducting participant observation in the artist's studios. A typical day of fieldwork in the studio would usually look something like the following...We usually started in the morning with coffee and a debrief of the artist's previous week's activities, including any particular issues that had arisen, developments on previous discussions, or new opportunities that had emerged. This initial meeting would commonly take place in the kitchen or dining area of the artist's home. This was often a time to reconnect with my informant and to begin to re-establish intimacy again after a period of not seeing one another. After this we would move to the studio, which varied in its proximity from the more domestic areas of the house. In some cases the living and work spaces were virtually the same, and for others the spaces were completely separate. It was clear that a significant difference in where the workspaces were set up was very simply one of the access to resources and space that the different artists had, as all the artists I worked with had, at some stage, expressed an ideal type of studio that they would like, though not all had achieved this goal. Once we entered the studio, the artist and I would discuss what the plan was for the day and I would usually be shown what work had been done since last time I was there. After that, my informant would usually begin working and conversations would take place sporadically as the work progressed. The process of conversing whilst working was something that functioned effectively for me, and it seemed for the artists I worked with, as conversations flowed quite well, and any silences that occurred seemed quite natural. Being a part of the home culture of my research participants made those initial collaborations a little easier to develop, but I consider that assuming the role of the 'insider' in terms of my own artistic education and background provided me with a significant advantage upon which to build those relationships and connections further. While being an artist insider was a role that came very naturally to me whilst conducting field research, I also assumed a range of other roles that were either assigned to me, or that seemed most natural or appropriate for the setting I found myself in. Different roles ascribe the researcher with different social meanings and can have a significant impact on the kinds of relationships that are developed and data that is collected. Brockman's (2010) experience as a researcher mirrors my own in terms of his assumption of a range of roles, which 'included 'researcher as PhD student', 'researcher as work experience student', 'researcher as auxiliary help', 'researcher as customer' and 'researcher as college student'. Brockman reflected that 'these were never static but fluid...[and he] would move between several roles in any of the learning environments' with each role being 'constructed and developed within the research context, often remaining fragile, constantly needing to be reasserted, and being transformed or disintegrating in the process'

(2010: 65). The assumption of different roles was something that was not necessarily a conscious decision for me, but rather an expression of a range of internal and external processes, such as my interest or experience in the activities that were taking place, my conception of myself at the time, my level of anxiety over the way in which a collaboration was proceeding, or as a result of a dynamic that seemed as though it had its own momentum. Despite the more uncontrollable elements of this process, the results in terms of the maintenance of good relations with my informants, and the collection of relevant and useful data, were adequate and this I attribute to my commitment to maintaining a warm, flexible and approachable demeanour that facilitated good communication across a range of situations that occurred.

Whilst working in the studio with my informants I generally used four main types of information recording tools and processes. I generally always had the audio recorder playing, and also took supplementary written notes, photos and video recordings as necessary. The work time in the studio was also a time during which I was able to more closely notice and reflect upon many of the more subtle elements of the practice and the environment, which I could later explore more through discussions with the artist. For example, when watching one artist working on a painting, I was able to record a recurring pattern in the way in which he moved in relation to the painting he was working on. This included a period of reflection and review of the whole painting from between 2 and 3 meters away, which lasted for up to 10 minutes, to a more active period of intense close up work, usually focusing on a specific area depending on the stage of completion of the painting. There were a range of thought processes and learned practices associated with these movements, which were explored and articulated at a later stage during conversations with the artist. For outings with my informants, such as exhibition set-ups and openings, I mainly relied on notes recorded after the fact to detail the proceedings, participants and settings. I also used audio recording, where appropriate, and photography (with permission) as other forms of record keeping. Where possible I also collected supplementary information such as exhibition invitations, opening statements by invited guests, pricelists or brochures and reviews. These resources provided an excellent supplement to developing a context for an artist's practice, and also formed part of discourse analysis in relation to understanding the ways in which the art world positions itself and its participants within the context of the wider culture.

After more than three years conducting fieldwork on a part-time basis, I had collected a significant amount of research materials that were all arranged in either hard copy or electronic filing systems. The processing of the data also included the application of a system of coding to the field notes and transcriptions I had made. In my case I utilised a simple system of numbering whole paragraphs with the numbers of chapters that they might have a relevance to. This allowed me to undertake a simple search of the number in question during the write up of any particular chapter so that I was able to review the information that I had tagged for continued relevance. My own system for processing data was fairly basic but there are other commonly used processes such as the Miles and Huberman Framework (Miles and Huberman 1994), which focus on a much more rigid process for developing and adhering to a structure for the analysis and interpretation of data, including data reduction, display, and the drawing and verification of conclusions. In qualitative analysis the importance of maintaining the integrity and context of usually unique and subjective information is something that is of considerable importance during the data reduction and display stages. In the case of my research, I had already broadly organised my field notes and other research into named folders as I went along (having had an idea of the chapters I intended to write in a general sense) and I then undertook the basic coding of those resources, as appropriate, within their current locations. In hindsight, the application of more rigorous processes of data management would have significantly reduced the time I subsequently spent re-examining the resources I had collected over the long period of time I was in the field.

The analysis of the data I had collected started at the planning stages of my project with an identification of the kinds of theoretical perspectives that I may refer to in my thesis. The tagging of the data, as discussed above, was also part of the broad analysis process in that it provided me with a way to begin to categorise the information into the chapter structure that I had set out. The main analysis processes, however, was largely undertaken as a part of the writing up of the thesis. In this capacity my analysis has primarily been based on the development of an understanding of the experience of being an artist, as gathered during the course of my fieldwork, and demonstrated through the collected data. A key focus of this was in drawing connections with the ways in which the artist's practice is informed by their conflicting social position, their own specific personal and public, political and social, agendas, and the more practical imperatives, such as the need to make a living through selling work, maintaining relationships, developing and fostering skills etc. The more I engaged with the material I had, the clearer it was that the artists I worked with functioned

within the broad parameters of a special social status, and that the ways in which this status was expressed was evident in many areas of their professional and public lives.

The research data and information that resulted from the planning and conduct of my project culminates in this thesis. The following chapters, therefore, provide an account of a number of discrete areas of my informant's lives and work, which work independently and together to form a picture of what it is to be an artist in South Australia in the 2000's.

CHAPTER 3

BEING AN ARTIST

3.1. CREATING A CREATOR

It could be said that within all traditional and contemporary societies there is a special, yet usually highly integrated, place for the creators of material objects, whose purpose can be said to be more esoteric, spiritual, aesthetic, magical or symbolic, than merely practical, in nature (see Morphy 1995 and Gell 1998 for specific anthropological accounts of art's symbolic and esoteric qualities and meaning). In the contemporary western paradigm these individuals are known as artists. But how does one 'become' an artist and what is it to 'be' an artist? These are the questions I explore in this chapter with a focus on understanding the role of becoming and being an artist as one in which individuals assume an identity and practice that is understood to be socially engaged, and that invites social interaction and dialogue. The role of artist is also seen as pedagogical, socially active, therapeutic, and culturally stimulating, and is inherently and richly laden and interwoven with the complexities of the social and cultural worlds and relationships within which it exists. Art critic Robert Hughes asserts that the project of becoming and being an artist can be said to be a process of mediation between the conceptual and real (material) bits of the social world (Hughes 1991: 1). In this capacity the artist's role is often seen to be one in which the practitioner is compelled to identify, explore, contest, and most importantly *communicate*, cultural knowledge, meanings and norms, and to present these in a tangible, and often aesthetically pleasing, or at least stimulating, visual and material form. This contributes to that ongoing social process which, as Hughes opines, 'make[s] the world whole and comprehensible' (Ibid: 1) to the members of a given society. Within this context artists can be seen to exhibit the dual characteristics of being motivated by both external social, and internal personal, factors that provide them with the framework for the creation and ongoing maintenance of their artistic identities and practices. This was exemplified within my own research, with my informants articulating and demonstrating the tension that exists between the internal and external drivers for becoming an artist. It is their personal understandings and experiences of becoming and being artists, therefore, that informs my discussions about what it is to become, and be, an artist in this chapter. A key overarching element that emerges throughout the chapter is the desire and willingness of the artists I

worked with to assume a unique professional role in society, in which their personal and work lives are highly integrated, and upon which the label of 'artist' can be applied to the individual as both private and professional person. This kind of integrated professional and personal identity is somewhat unusual in contemporary society, and can be said to be in opposition to the more common compartmentalised personal and professional identities assumed by individuals in the emerging modern work paradigm.

This chapter focuses on articulating the ways in which my informants interacted with, and articulated, prioritised and understood, a number of central beliefs and normalised values that underpins the practice of being an artist within the contemporary Australian context. It is my contention that the way in which Australian mainstream society interacts with the cultural specificities of the artist's worlds, and vice-versa, demonstrates the integral interdependence of the two. In this capacity the chapter supports the notion that, although artists are often seen as being quite different from most individuals in mainstream society, particularly in terms of their personalities, and work and lifestyles, they are also an inherent part of mainstream society and are 'given' their special status through the vehicle of their society's normalised practices and beliefs, to which they are also intrinsically tied. This is evident in the social latitude and license that is conferred upon artists, is reflected in the economic value of the Australian and global art worlds, and is demonstrated through official mechanisms such as cultural and creative policies and funding. A significant element associated with the social value placed on art is that of its potential to act as a mirror to reflect society and social relations and to be a means through which (both official and unofficial) knowledge can be transmitted. Artists, therefore, play a key role in the continual identification, representation and contestation of normalised social values and practices that we may take for granted (Lippard 1995:72).

The notion that a central role of the artist is in exposing and eliciting dialogue on social issues is a generally well established (though not always welcomed) idea that has been explored within the art-related academic disciplines (Danto 1991, Brunstein 1995, Marchart 1998, Farkas 1999, Mullins 2003, Myers 2004, Wallis 2004, Sharpe et al 2005). Examples from my own research field support the idea of artists understanding themselves as using their artworks as a kind of symbolic 'devil's advocate', a term which is defined as 'someone who pretends, in an argument or discussion, to be against an idea or plan that a lot of people support, in order to make people discuss and consider it in more detail' (Cambridge 2016). In the case of the artists I worked with, they considered that their own form of 'devil's

advocacy' was expressed through the meaning they built into their artworks. The artists I worked with also engaged in a broad range of much less contentious, more socially cohesive or therapeutic, and sometimes quite banal, social activities. Those activities could be seen as having a role in maintaining, representing or challenging many everyday aspects of our social world, shared meaning and collective identities, including those that are based around notions of knowledge, power, beauty or morality. Whilst not all the artists I worked with expressed a strong political involvement or commitment, to varying degrees they all displayed a desire, through their work, to bring their internal and external life and work life experiences and social perspectives into clearer focus for a wider audience. The articulated and demonstrated reasons behind this are also couched in terms of internal and external compulsions and motivators. This includes the way in which artists see themselves as inherently imbued with the talent and need to express their identities and experiences through tangible means (in the case of visual artists through their artworks), but also through their self-identified roles as cultural and creative workers and social facilitators. As social facilitators artists use their expertise in symbolic presentation to elicit public engagement with contentious social issues and practices, including utilising traditional forums such as exhibitions and presentations to deliver their social messages through the medium of their artworks. My argument that artists hold a unique social role which incorporates social and cultural facilitation and mediation, is demonstrated in the ways in which the artists themselves understand and express their role in the private and public practices they undertake. The main explanatory tool that I use to discuss this is through the presentation of ethnographic research data that is supported by relevant social discourse and research on artists, and other cultural and creative workers. Key elements in the discussion relate to the perceived imperative within artists to create art, the importance of being talented, and the obligation to articulate and disseminate social knowledge and meaning in order to support social engagement, renewal, health and development.

The broad areas I cover starts with a discussion on how one becomes, and sustains an identity as, an artist. This includes an exploration of the factors that underpin the way in which the individuals I worked with understand themselves as being inherently talented and artistic, and the processes that they undertake to be seen as legitimate practitioners in the artistic fields. The chapter continues with an explication of the way in which an artist's somewhat unconventional lifestyles are understood to be a reflection of both their unique personalities as well as an accepted way of performing their profession on a wider social level. This is followed by a discussion of the ways in which artists assume responsibility for

being cultural facilitators and mediators through the work that they produce, the performances and rituals they undertake and the relationships they foster and maintain.

3.2. THE ARTISTIC IMPERATIVE

How does an individual begin to see themselves as an artist? What is it that compels them to choose to become an artist, and what are the factors that are taken into consideration in order for someone to consider themselves an artist? This section explores the ways in which the artists I worked with described the process of becoming an artist, and discusses, through presentation of ethnographic material, the range of ways in which the individual begins their journey of becoming an artist. The accounts of what it is to become an artist are all somewhat different (as one would expect) but there are broad themes that can be drawn together to make a number of conclusions about the most important elements of this process. In this capacity, a key element that emerged in this process was in relation to the artist's understanding of themselves as being in some way inherently imbued with the need to make art. By this I mean that they saw themselves as being compelled by an artistic imperative that emerges through, either a gradual process starting early on in life, or has its origin in a more 'epiphanic' manner, as a result of an event or opportunity that triggered something that already existed within the individual.⁶

Whether this knowledge of their imperative always seemed to be there, or arose in a more sudden manner, there is a prevailing understanding that this compulsion is a key part of the internal core of an artistic personality. In this capacity, all the artists I worked with appeared to have had similar experiences in terms of having, at some stage in their early life or during their school years, a great enjoyment of drawing or constructing objects, and of being recognised as having talent in the arts. This was eventually followed by a development of skills through practice or education, or both, something which sometimes happened early in life, whilst for others it was something they pursued after years in other work or careers. This development of skills was also accompanied, very significantly, by both the explicit and implicit development of a persona of artist, a concept of self as artist, which was considered to be driven by a need to express their deeply felt creative

⁶ When discussing the term epiphanic I refer to it in the secularised Joycean (Joyce 2012: Chapter XXV) sense, which has come to mean a sudden manifestation of the essence or meaning of something, or a comprehension or perception of reality by means of a sudden intuitive realization. When the term epiphany is used in everyday language it is in reference to the sudden profundity of a notion or idea that may lead to great changes in the thoughts or actions of the person who has been visited in this way.

imperative, but was also shaped by their social engagement with the various facets of the art world. My informants generally, however, saw the aetiology of their origins as artists as coming from an internal place brought out. For example, in describing the process that led to her 'coming to be' as an artist, one of the artists I worked with, Ann, articulates a kind of deep internal compulsion that drove the choices she made. It is an epiphanic experience of sorts. Her description also highlights the satisfaction that resulted from following that internal compulsive drive:

I had a really hard time doing what my parents wanted me to do. I didn't finish school, didn't like the jobs I had, and it wasn't until I started thinking of myself as an artist that I really felt 'right' about myself. Making art is my way of working out the world. Well, I think the transformation happened when I decided to stop working at the chemist shop and go back to school. My mother said I could never have a career but I did end up going back to school as a mature age student (I was allowed to wear my own shirt which everyone envied me for). That's when I started learning about making art, but when my father died I left home and moved in with my sister in the hills. There was one night there that I spent with my scissors and pieces of paper. I started drawing pictures of a plant outside my sister's house and every time I finished a drawing I cut a piece of hair off and had another sherry. I ended up being almost bald but I came to understand that the drawing was about me being an artist, and I have had my hair short ever since so that everyone could always see who I was.

(Howe-Piening 2006)

Ann's experience speaks strongly of her need to fulfil a suppressed inherent part of herself, which brought about a positive change, as she saw it, in the way she felt about herself and presented herself to the world. Another artist, Rick, also told his story of becoming a sculptor, which started with a strong desire to relive a feeling of deep satisfaction he experienced earlier in life at a time when he had been encouraged to make art:

I started working with very plastic materials like clay and it goes back even as far to when I was maybe 8 years old and someone gave me a lump of clay to play with and I made a really amazing mythical creature when most kids were making pinch pots, and I had such a good time working with my hands and making art that it was something I always pursued. When I was in high school I did art, when I was in the navy I was doing ceramic work in different ceramic studios in the west coast...yeah... my last few years in public high school in Seattle that was in a kind of ghetto area...a black area that incorporated my own small adjacent neighbourhood. The school had been the recipient of funds from the government to implement programs that were designed to get kids off the street...in this school it had a fine arts focus and had amazing arts facilities. It was so good that really great art teachers wanted to teach there. There were a few crazy... kids like me who took advantage of it and had such a great time...anyway, this high school had a small metal working facility and I was able to finish a 5ft steel grasshopper that I had been working on previously. This really gave me a chance to learn things like welding for the first time. At the same time I was introduced to a few artists that really influenced me...the Swiss guy Tanguely (he spelled it out in a couple of different ways), who made these huge metal pieces that would self destruct...Oldenberg's giant soft sculptures...I loved big things, mechanical things so metal sculpture was what appealed to me. So I put the art on the backburner for a number of years to pursue a career in computers. In about 2001 I had a bit of a relationship hiccup and I had a mid-life correction of sorts. At this time someone asked me if there was anything I could do what would it be? I

told her if I could do anything I would be an artist. This was like an epiphany for me and so I started to do some TAFE courses on welding, machining, casting etc. I then went out and hired a workshop close to home and started to make art. That's how I became an artist.

(Howe-Piening 2006)

Ann's and Rick's descriptions evoke a strong resonance with a characterisation of artists as those individuals who are somehow *compelled* to be artists, whose very core personal identity is tied to the need to create, and whose essential mode of communication, with and about their world, is best achieved through the works they make. During his research on local art markets Plattner found that the artists he worked with articulated very similar ideals. He categorised his informants into a number of groups that included, most predominantly, business artists (interested in making money above all), and 'art for art's sake' artists, 'for whom art is not merely a profession but an activity necessary for their survival as a human being' (Plattner 1996:79). Plattner quotes one artist who says that 'it's not a job at all. It's what I do, it's who I am...my strongest feeling is that I make art because I am driven to, because I *have* to' (Ibid). This way of understanding the true *nature* of an artist as being someone who needs to make art for art's sake is a compelling idea that was strongly adopted by my informants as a primary reason they became artists. The notion, however, also has such a strong social presence that it is difficult to articulate the impact of either set of influences. In this capacity, our popular cultural forms have, historically and currently, displayed ubiquitous examples of the notion of the compelled artist, and these are enshrined within literature and in more contemporary media platforms (see literature such as Bronte 1847, West 1939, Wolf 1955, and films such as Allen 1989, Coen 1989, Morrison 2005).

The idea of expressing oneself as an artist and through the artistic practice and lifestyle was also characterised as a form of self healing. This was demonstrated to be a predominant part of the practice of art making for a number of the artists I worked with during my research, which was highlighted during conversations in which my informants explained how they worked in a manner that often saw the emotional and psychological aspects of art being given as much importance as the aesthetic or technical aspects of art making. In reflecting on this practice my informants expressed a strong appreciation of the idea that being an artist is about the 'need' to exercise self expression on a range of levels. Upon exploring this notion most of the artists I worked with demonstrated some need to externalise their personal emotions, feelings, beliefs, relationships and experiences, through the creation of

their artworks. The painter Ron, extended on this idea further when he discussed the duality of purpose that exists for most artists:

It's a bit hard to define why I became an artist. I think making art is definitely my way of communicating to the world about what I am thinking, what's happening for me, what's important to focus on...you know. I use painting a lot to figure out what's going on inside me, like when I had cancer and I had a lot of dark stuff to deal with, the painting was a way for me to bring that out. Still, if I was on a desert island by myself, even if I had my paints and everything there with me, I don't think that I would paint because there would be no audience to paint for, no one to communicate with

(Howe-Piening 2006)

So while Ron was certain that painting provided an important outlet for his inner emotional world, he recognised that there was an equally important social imperative attached to his painting, so much so, that in the case of there being no-one around to share his painting with, he considered it a less important activity to undertake. During his period of illness many of the artworks that Ron made changed in their character and subject. When discussing one particular painting made at that time Ron talked about the way in which he was able to most effectively reflect on and express his feelings of depression and fear associated with his cancer by symbolising it through his art. It allowed him to:

put my experience of my world, and the emotions that I had at that time, into something that I could understand, that made sense to me, and that somehow gave what was happening a place in the world.

(Howe-Piening 2006)

Most of the artworks Ron made at this time were exhibited and made available for purchase, but the one that was the subject of this discussion was kept and displayed in a spare room at Ron's house, a decision that was articulated as being made in relation to the painting's role in remembering the painful journey he went through during his illness and recovery.

The experiences of my informants support the notion that to become, and to be, a legitimate artist one must possess an inherent artistic personality. It is an idea that has strong resonance with the artists I worked with but is not the only factor that is considered to be essential to the process of emerging and practicing successfully as an artist. Working in concert with this notion, therefore, is the idea that one must also be naturally talented in order to make it as an artist. The following section focuses on the ways in which talent, when conceptualised as an inherent capability, and externally recognised, is understood by

the artists I worked with, and how they see this capability as having a connection with the achievement of success in the arts.

3.3. THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING TALENTED

In this section I explore the notion of talent and examine the social and individual constructions, perceptions and ideas that are connected to, and impact on, this unique human attribute. I explore how this key essential idea relating to the natural characteristics an individual possesses impacts on the process of becoming an artist, including how talent is seen to influence, or not, an artist's actual and perceived success in their chosen field. This chapter supports my argument that artists occupy a unique social position by demonstrating that notions of the importance of talent are inherently linked to artists' integrated public and private identities, and that the perceived possession of talent impacts on the successful undertaking of their role. . In this capacity, the section begins with a discussion on talent itself and what it is understood to be, both within and external to the artistic community. I also discuss, in terms of the experiences of my own informants, how the idea of talent has contributed to the process of becoming an artist. I then go on to discuss the way in which talent is characterised as a key concern in the artistic culture, including highlighting the contradictory ways in which the idea of talent is utilised to justify the success, or lack thereof, of the artists I worked with. Working within this framework two other key attributes emerged, which were considered by my informants to have an intimate connection to the notion of talent and the achievement of success. These attributes are 'charisma' and 'integrity', though my informants also used a number of other different terms, such as 'networker', 'sell-out' and 'self-promoter' when discussing the means, other than talent and hard-work, through which particular artists achieved success in their field. The ways in which these terms were applied by my informants provided me with an understanding of a common explanatory framework, which appeared to have a somewhat moral underpinning, and which often provided my informants with a sense of legitimacy with regard to their own level of success in the field.

The unique ways in which artists are characterised and treated, which can manifest in both positive and negative representations, is intimately connected to their assumed inherent characteristics. A primary inherent characteristic of artists is said to be their innate possession of talent, which includes having above average fine motor skills and visual capacities, and a heightened ability to identify, interpret and manipulate social symbols and icons to present, represent or disrupt shared cultural meaning. When discussing the

difference between ‘precocious’ drawers and children perceived as having no distinction in the field of drawing, Ellen Winner, a researcher in the role of talent in the visual arts, articulates four key characteristics that demonstrate the presence of natural artistic talent in a child. These are: 1.The early (from two years of age) ability to draw recognisable and distinguishable shapes, 2.The ability to incorporate fluid contours in drawings to further delineate specific outlines, 3.The inclusion of a significant number of details –‘For example, one child added gas tanks, axles, grills, bumpers, headlights, and brake boxes to his vehicles’ and, 4. The early inclusion of techniques to depict depth in a drawing, such as perspective (1996:7-9). This aligns with the narratives I often heard during my field research in which my informants would discuss the ways in which their early talent manifested and expressed itself, for example, the eight year old Rick’s aforementioned ‘amazing mythical creature’.

When searching for a definition of talent, one will most frequently find iterations of the following: ‘an innate ability, aptitude, or faculty, especially when unspecified, above average ability’ (Collins Dictionary 2014). This definition aligns with the popular representations of talented individuals as being the lucky recipients of desired attributes that must be further developed. Talent, in this capacity, is this kind of quasi-magical thing that some people naturally possess, which can be recognised, fostered and developed both by the individual in possession of said talent, or by others around that person. Ideas that are commonly associated with talent is that it is desirable in its raw state, but in order for it to become something of personal or social use or significance, it must be accompanied by hard work, discipline, the correct training, and the appropriate management. Quotes such as the following by Emile Zola abound in cultural discussions of talent: ‘the artist is nothing without the gift, but the gift is nothing without work.’ (Zola cited in Chang 2006). In this sense, although the talent itself is seen as a positive attribute, the development of that talent through the meritocratic application of discipline, and submission to the traditions of education and training, imbue the talented person with a moral legitimacy to own that talent. It is a common theme with a western cultural paradigm to hear of people ‘wasting’ their talents, and this is seen as a moral issue and a demonstration that the person may not have been deserving of their talent in the first place. For example, painter Frizz told me she had been charged with the offence of wasting her talent when her spiritual interests and art therapy practice began to influence her painting style:

When I finished art school I rented a studio and started to really focus on painting. My work at the time was a kind of realism and lots of portraits. I started to get pretty successful quite

quickly and was offered exhibitions with a particular gallery in town, which ended up in me having a couple of regular patrons who started collecting my work. I did that for a couple of years but then I started getting really interested in meditation and spirituality, and was really interested in the healing power of mandalas. I decided that I really just wanted to paint mandalas because they felt really healing to me, and so gave up on the other style of painting and just started doing that. I have tried to get the gallery and the collectors interested in buying my mandala paintings, but have been told pretty bluntly by the gallery that I am wasting my talent on doing these paintings and if I want to start making some money again I should get back to doing 'real' art.

(Howe-Piening 2006)

Whilst Frizz was very aware of the perspective of the gallery and patrons, she chose not to re-engage with her previous painting style, though she did leave the idea open for the future should her financial situation become problematic. Frizz did not agree with the 'wasting of talent' perspective that had been proffered because she felt that she was making the best use of her innate abilities through combining her painting prowess with a therapeutic outcome for herself, and for her art therapy clients. The rejection of Frizz's chosen style of painting is an indication that the parameters around what is recognised as an appropriate expression of talent within the 'serious' art world is quite limited, despite there being a seemingly wide range of styles and media at the disposal of, and accepted for use by, visual artists.

So while people with recognised talents (in a wide range of areas) are given an enhanced social status, that status does seem to be predicated upon making appropriate social use of these attributes, which involves the moral aspects of discipline, hard work and diligent exploitation of raw resources. This has resonance with Weber's notion of the concept of the calling (1905), in which he makes a connection between the moral aspects of Protestantism with the rise of Capitalism, and incorporates a social perspective on craft as 'calling', which has the social purpose of ensuring an enduring devotion to working hard in one's chosen field (1905: 78-92). In addition to these moral aspects of talent, the application of this attribute in the modern sense is also usually accompanied by the added complexity of competition. In this capacity, it can be seen that given the large population of potentially talented people in the world, and with consideration to the considerable resources that are often available to exploit and develop talent, there is likely to be a surplus of talented people to take up all the esteemed positions available in society. In a contemporary social context, there are a number of structures and institutions that have arisen to manage and frame the phenomena of talent within the context of competition. These include talent identification and development organisations, such as educational institutions and targeted training bodies like the Australian Institute of Sports. Publicly and privately funded

organisations also play a key role in the determination and delineation of talent through the granting of bursaries, fellowships, project funds and prizes. In all of this, the emphasis is on a hierarchy of expertise to manage the determinations on talent for the rest of the community⁷.

Even in the case of newly emerging and highly mediated popular forms of competing on the basis of talent, such as television programs like ‘Australia’s Got Talent’ (Freemantle Media Australia 2015), there is always an expert component to what is otherwise couched as a very democratic voting process, and it is these highly sensationalised determinations made by the experts in the field that guide people’s understanding of talent, and their consequent voting patterns.

The artists I worked with were keenly aware of the competing aspects associated with attaining success, and an esteemed position, in the field of visual arts. Whilst they recognised themselves as having innate talent, and having done the work to develop that talent, they understood that this did not necessarily equate with success. Success in the eyes of my informants was articulated as being able to make a full time living from their art practice and having a public profile as a recognised talent, both within and outside of the arts community, which translated into regular patronage and offers of work, access to the best exhibition spaces and positive reviews in popular media publications. Artists also discussed the value of having opportunities to influence future directions in art through participating on arts related boards and committees, developing high profile relationships, developing or providing education programs, and through managing other projects and programs of public relevance (such as public artworks). The focus for most artists was in the practical and somewhat strategic management of their developed talent in a manner that incorporated both financial and social outcomes. As Rick put it:

it’s not only about finding a gallery to represent and support me (though that is pretty important to me), it’s also about being able to use my skills and talent to contribute to making the place [Australia] a better place for the arts. That is why I decided to apply for a place on the NAVA [National Association of Visual Arts] board, and why I lend out my sculptures to

⁷ In the arts, institutions such as the Archibald Prize not only provide the art world and the community with a reminder of the expertise required to determine real talent, but also clearly symbolise the gulf between expert and novice art appreciation through the vehicle of the Packing Room Prize, the winner of which is virtually never the same as the expert’s pick. Another important distinction between the two is the prize money awarded to the different categories – the Packing Room Prize has an award of \$1500, while the Portrait category has a \$75,000 award (Art Gallery NSW 2014).

schools and businesses to display in public....so even though I am still not supporting myself through my art yet, I do have a pretty good profile, and networks, that will be really useful in the long term.

(Howe-Piening2006)

As in the case of Rick, my other informants' reflections on the nature and impact of talent in their chosen field were also couched in contrasting ideological and practical terms, which reflected the lived complexity of what might at first seem to be a relatively simple concept. Within this context it was apparent in all our discussions on this topic that the notion of talent is somewhat contentious in the eyes of my research participants, with the key factors around the contention being the conflicting explanatory frameworks that were explicitly and implicitly espoused, and which, it appeared to me, were tied to the achievement of success in the field, and in particular, their own relative success in the field in comparison to others.

She made it way bigger than she should have....there are lots of much more talented artists who are still doing cleaning or working in bars...they just don't have the same ability to, you know, promote themselves...

(Howe-Piening 2006)

This quote is quite typical of many conversations I had with the artists I worked with, which demonstrates the tense relationship between the notion of talent, and the achievement of success, in the arts. In many of the discussions of talent that I engaged with, the notions of integrity, authenticity and personality were frequently raised. These were seen to be attributes that directly impacted on the degree of success an artist might experience, and created a context within which to interpret the varying understanding of the impact and nature of talent at any given time. These ideas of integrity, authenticity and personality were evoked on a regular basis across the spectrum of my informants, and it appeared that they were applied in a number of ways. The ways in which these key ideas were applied included the expression of a number of sub-cultural values associated with the art world, as well as in terms of being a strategy for maintaining a positive sense of self as a legitimate artist even though they had not 'made it'.

It could be assumed that art world experts (adjudicators of talent) and members of our wider society would, for the most part, characterise artists with the highest level of talent as being worthy of the highest level of success. This perspective is one that is held up as an

explicit value in all the competitive processes associated with the determination of talent in the arts.⁸

Amongst my informants, however, it was often noted that there are other elements that factor into the success of artists, which are seen as having the effect of lowering the quality and integrity of popular art. It was often cited that those people who are sublime networkers, who have charisma and the ability to construct a sensational or attractive public persona for themselves, often have better success in the field of art than those who are objectively determined to be more talented or skilled. One of my informants cited the case of a now successful colleague with whom they had attended art school.

she was always one of those people who was just cool, you know? Everyone wanted to be around her. She really wasn't the most talented person when it came to art though, and she took heaps of technical shortcuts that made a few people doubt her skill. I know that she still uses the same shortcuts now that she is really successful and a lot of people who work really hard at getting things done the right way are pretty pissed off that she is doing so well when they are still struggling

(Howe-Piening 2006)

This notion of the impact of charisma on levels of success was also often coupled with an understanding of the importance of integrity, which was considered to be predominant as a factor that played into the level of success, or not, that an artist might achieve. Integrity, as used by my informants, was characterised as maintaining a sense of personal authenticity and uniqueness, being true to one's political and social beliefs, and resisting the urge to 'sell out' by caving in to making whatever is popular. As one informant put it having integrity is 'saying no to making art that is designed purely to match the couches and rugs of the well to do'. Even though an artist might work in a more decorative field that is somewhat aligned to the field of fine arts, such as graphic design for example, there is a

⁸ For example, when announcing the winners of the 2014 Sidney Myer Creative Fellowship Prize (worth \$160,000 over a two-year period), the Chair of the Peer Review Panel cited the talent and contribution of artists in our society as 'something we take seriously. We actively support and nurture them [and] we want them to have the opportunity to keep working in their chosen field, to keep producing work that challenges our ideas and ways of living as a society. The arts, I believe, are critical to a dynamic and thinking community and I congratulate each of the Fellows for their vision, talent and dedication to their practice.'(Myer 2014)

strong distinction made between having to make a living and the core practice of their art, which was considered to be more about social and self expression. Becker discusses this in terms of the gaining and maintenance of a reputation as an authentic and talented artist:

Since artists know that other art world participants make reputational inferences from their work, they try to control the work that becomes available for making such inferences. They destroy work they don't want considered, or label it 'unfinished', if they are lucky, a court may (as French courts can) prevent the circulation of work they don't want publicly attributed to them. They distinguish categories of work, as contemporary photographers sometimes distinguish their 'commercial' work (not to be considered in assessing them as artists) from their 'personal' work (to be so used), according to the seriousness of their intentions in making it.

(Becker 1984:357)

While work and intention is invested in the development and maintenance of a reputation as a talented and authentic artist, there is a prevailing perspective that talent (in its developed state) and hard work may not always be enough to ensure that artists are able to maintain a sustainable living in the arts. This is an interesting idea because it places the notion of talent, as a usually exalted attribute, in a rather conflicted position in terms of its potential value as an asset for an artist. The contributing complicating factors of charisma and integrity potentially further problematise the social ideas around the linear progression from innate talent, through education and development, and on to success. Additionally, the notion of success being impeded by these other factors also serves a very important role in the self preservation of the artist's sense of self as a professional practitioner, and provides them with an explanatory framework that sustains and motivates them to continue their 'called' practice. This way of understanding the chances of success in the art world was evident in a number of ways, including the characterisation of other more successful artists as capitalising on other additional, and less artistically authentic, attributes, and conversely, in positioning themselves as maintaining a sense of artistic rigour through rejecting 'sell out' characteristics and opportunities.

3.4. ARTISTIC PERSONAS AND OBLIGATIONS

Contemporary popular characterisations of artists often depict them as being those individuals that walk a tightrope across the spectrum of social positions. In terms of lifestyle, political beliefs, social relationships and personal financial status they are often seen as being situated on the margins of society, but their contribution to cultural and

creative economies is considered to be an essential part of the wider mainstream economic and social world. My informants recognised this unusual juxtaposition of social status but considered it a very natural part of the role of an artist. When explaining how she experienced this juxtaposition, Ann considered it amusing that her art could be found in state, national and international art galleries, and that she had received an Order of Australia medal, but she could hardly afford to pay her electricity bill. She considered, however, that her freedom to be her 'strange self' made up for the lack of financial reward. Ann also agreed that she was much more free to introduce subjects that might be taboo or awkward in other professions. The concept of artists as facilitator of social dialogue is not a new one. In the 1970's American feminist artist Suzanne Lacy described the goal of her art as being that which enabled the audience to directly engage in local issues of importance, and by placing her work in public places, it challenged those who come across it to engage with the harsh reality of certain issues in their society, which they may otherwise not be exposed to, or may choose to ignore. (Lacy quoted in Farkas 1999:36) Artists also tackle the less controversial or critical matters of life that expose and examine the cultural norms that we base our lives upon, things such as cultural notions of pleasure, goodness, tradition, kinship, community and connectedness. For example, Ann's works from her Anticipation exhibition spoke of the way in which the concept of a successful life in the western context is predicated upon having a purpose, something to anticipate. The pieces were designed to elicit a reflection on those normalised ideas about our lives and to reflect on the impact of those beliefs. In addition to playing a key role in motivating social thought and discussion about life and work the social world at a range of levels, artists also participate in a range of socially beneficial activities, such as educational, health and community cohesion events and programs. These activities contribute positively to the Australian cultural economy, and the special role that artists play in all of these capacities is central to being an artist. The socially facilitative role of the cultural and creative work was readily adopted and performed by the artists I worked with and, with that in mind, this section looks at the way in which my informants understood their role in a wider social context. This includes the way in which my informants internalised and expressed some key artistic characteristics, and the role they saw themselves playing in the facilitation of cultural renewal, maintenance and development.

It was evident, in talking and working with my informants, that there was a conceptual tension that existed between the need to make art as a personal identity project, and the more public aspects of being an artist. The public aspects compels the artist to participate,

as a member of the art world, in a range of activities that may include exhibitions, open days, community events or collective projects, and at which they are encouraged to perform in the public persona of 'artist'. The need to make a public contribution as an artist can be seen to be linked to the high levels of social status and capital that is given to artists, and is something that can be seen to be maintained and upheld by the official enshrinement of the importance of their work and products in the wider community, and on a local, national and global scale. The artistic persona that is performed and expressed by artists, therefore, can be seen to be a phenomena that encompasses a range of influences and characterisations that have their basis in socially normalised practices and meanings. This incorporates such ideas as those enshrined in public policy statements, and encompasses the popular culture notions of artists being those that often live what is considered to be unconventional, marginal, or even sometimes controversial, lives when measured against mainstream norms, particularly in relation to their work practices, and their political and social values. The image of the artist is also likely to be tied into a well established historical imperative associated with the socially active role of artist within a western perspective, which sees the artist as not only creator of beauty and presenter of history, but also having the power to represent social realities (such as hierarchies and power relationships) or reveal uncomfortable political and social truths (consider the work of such artists as Goya, Picasso, Courbet, Reubens).

Working forward from this traditional perspective, my research data suggests that the unique historical and social positioning of artists, which includes the strong modelling that occurs within the educational and cultural institutions that cater for developing and established art practitioners, does have an impact on the way in which artists construct and manage their own identities. These factors include how they present themselves in a public sphere, the level of latitude they allow themselves to subvert mainstream labour, political and moral norms and boundaries, and how they negotiate the integration of these unconventional elements of their lived world with the imperative to get along in a wider world of political and economic reality. It is within these contexts that I posit the notion that the tension between the two social positions of self expressive artist and cultural facilitator is integrated into the agency and identity of the artist, and is seen by the artists I worked with as being an integral part of the experience of being an artist. There are, of course, varying degrees of lived experience and agency associated with the way in which the unconventional or marginal practices and beliefs of an individual artist are integrated with mainstream activities, institutions and ideas. All of the artists I worked with, however,

expressed at least some resonance with the notion of having a 'foot in each world', and this was considered to be a very normal part of being an artist.

The way in which the contradictory social roles of the artist played out was somewhat different depending on the various individuals I engaged with, but the consensus was that there were a number of clear connections to be made between the two separate social characterisations of artists, and how the individuals I worked with actually live and understand their own personal and professional lives. For example, ever since she became an artist in the 1960's Ann had lived a bohemian lifestyle in which she rejected many of the mainstream notions of marriage, living and domestic arrangements, politics, financial security and gender roles. The lifestyle she led would have been, and still is considered to be, highly unconventional when compared with mainstream social norms. She did, however, also work as a lecturer of some status at the predominant art school in South Australia and regularly undertook exhibitions at well known art galleries where she would attract well-off potential collectors. Additionally, Ann had numerous articles written about her, had a retrospective of her work exhibited at the Art Gallery of South Australia, and had one of her works displayed at the Las Angeles Museum of Modern Art. Despite her considerable reputation in the mainstream art world, Ann still very much embraces a marginal persona and this filters through to her work practices, spaces and social relationships. In this capacity, Ann and many of the other artists I worked with also expressed a strong desire to integrate the parts of their work and private life into their artistic persona. They saw themselves as artists in an holistic sense, an idea that would be familiar to many people when thinking about how it is to be an artist. For example, Painter Frizz's expressed a strong desire to incorporate her identity as artist into all of her work and private activities, which she saw as being emblematic of the uniquely integrated lifestyle that she wished to lead. She expressed this well when she was giving me tea in the lounge room of her tiny inner city flat, which was part art studio and part lounge room. Whilst perched in between an easel and a number of paintings leaning against a chair she discussed how she came to do work as an art therapist:

'I knew I had to earn extra money to get by since I don't make enough selling my paintings, but the thought of doing a normal 9-5 job just didn't work for me. I have had an interest in personal development for a while, and do lots of meditation and yoga, but since starting to paint Mandalas I have realised their therapeutic value on a lot of levels for people with issues. For me it was a no brainer. I would be able to work with art, help people, set my own hours and still paint at home when I want. So I did a correspondence course and set up a practice' (Howe-Piening 2007)

Throughout this chapter, examples like Ann's and Frizz's demonstrate the unique social position that artists hold. I argue that the practical application of the role can both support social change processes, or uphold the social status quo. While it may seem that the two applications are at odds with each other, I argue that they align quite appropriately with society's own somewhat conflicting values, which on the one hand lauds our capacity to progress and change, and on the other hand, demonstrates and expresses significant value in maintaining traditional practices and meanings. The cultural possibilities associated with the practice of art, therefore, is not only confined to the arena of personal political and social outcomes, but is also able to function as an educational and therapeutic tool. This therapeutic tool could be utilised for the artists' own personal benefit, but was also expected to be applied in the support of their wider communities and networks.

Art, however, is always a contentious field (as a part of its special place in society) and the view that artists should participate in social and political issues has also been subject to criticism in terms of how its appropriateness and efficacy is viewed, both within and external to the art community in general. There is a critical perspective which states that art and social and political action should not be combined at all as it impacts on the artistic and aesthetic freedom of artists. In this vein art historian Brustein claims that 'culture is not designed to do the work of politics' (1995:252). He extends upon this by asserting that artists who involve themselves with political movements inevitably compromise their individual artistic perspective and subordinate their artistic and imaginative creativity to the cause (Ibid:251-258). This view denies the independence and agency that artists express on a daily basis in their sole practices, but may be more pertinent with artists who work in a more collective setting where more acute social and peer pressure may be evident. This unique framework within which artists operate is one that is both embraced and routinely contested by the artists themselves, and the issues around this contestation are primarily in relation to the limitations that still exist around the expression of highly socially marginal, or politically contentious, issues of an ongoing or contemporary nature (consider Bill Henson's 2008 art exhibition in Sydney⁹). The pushing of boundaries in this way is often

⁹ On 22 May 2008, Bill Henson's photographic exhibition at the Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery in Paddington, Sydney, was cancelled after complaints were made about a number of photographs depicting nude underage girls. Many of the exhibition's photographs were subsequently seized by police, with the initial intention of imposing a charge of 'publishing an indecent article' under the Crimes Act. The action taken by police prompted significant media coverage of the images, which elicited considerable debate on censorship in Australia. The Australian Prime Minister at the time, Kevin Rudd, and a range of high profile art world

Footnote continued on next page.

the target of criticism from those social commentators who, like Brustein, are of the opinion that art has no place in the production of social discourse and the production of values. The position taken in this respect is often characterised as being unconventional, uncontrolled or pathologically socially progressive, and is seen by those commentators as an incitement to erode traditional social values and practices. The artists I worked with during the course of my field research exhibited a range of views, and some uncertainty, over their position on where the line for an artist should be in terms of their contestation of social boundaries. In this capacity, not all of my informants demonstrated their involvement in the cultural facilitation aspects of art through making and displaying art with a strong social or political message attached to it. The ones that did, however, considered it to be an important part of their practice and their 'social contract'. Most of the artists I worked with, at some level, expressed a sense of responsibility for, as one informant put it, 'making the hidden parts of social reality more visible', and a pleasure and satisfaction with taking on a socially active and philanthropic role.

Social facilitation also occurs through the delivery of publicly therapeutic functions that include the provision of art workshops and discussions, the contribution of artists to campaigns for the public good and the display of public artworks that provide an aesthetic and stimulating environment for all members of society. For example, Frizz articulated a very strong desire to use her art to help counsel troubled people using an art therapy approach. Art therapy provides an arts based framework of health practice that claims to have considerable benefits attached to it, as follows:

Art therapy is a mental health profession in which clients, facilitated by the art therapist, use art media, the creative process, and the resulting artwork to explore their feelings, reconcile emotional conflicts, foster self-awareness, manage behaviour and addictions, develop social skills, improve reality orientation, reduce anxiety, and increase self-esteem. A goal in art therapy is to improve or restore a client's functioning and his or her sense of personal well-being. Art therapy practice requires knowledge of visual art (drawing, painting, sculpture, and other art forms) and the creative process, as well as of human development, psychological, and counselling theories and techniques.

(American Art Therapy Association 2014)

Frizz had first utilised an art therapy approach on herself and found that, mainly through the painting of mandalas, she was able to create an improved psychological state for herself.

celebrities, such as Cate Blanchett, also weighed in to the debate, coming out on different sides of the censorship argument (Rudd for censorship of the photos, and Blanchett against).

She now has regular clients who undertake a range of different styles of art under Frizz's guidance. This approach to using art as therapy is still considered to be a somewhat alternative modality but there are more mainstream therapeutic approaches that put art at the centre of improved health outcomes. In this capacity, arts in health programs are now common across hospitals and health care centres in Australian cities and regional areas. The National Arts in Health Framework (2013) defines Arts in Health as:

'In its broadest sense, arts and health refers to the practice of applying arts initiatives to health problems and health promoting settings. It involves all art forms and may be focused at any point in the health care continuum. It also has an impact on the determinants of ill-health by changing individuals' attitudes to health risks and supporting community resilience. Arts and health initiatives can be delivered across a range of settings. Benefits can accrue for all stakeholders including government, health service providers, artists, those in health care and the wider community and include improved communication, better understanding, attitudinal change and clinical outcomes. Arts and health activities have their effect through different means and are achieved through experiencing the arts as an artist or creator, as a participant or member of an audience.'

(National Arts in Health 2013)

The benefits of the arts in health approach was demonstrated to me when I spent some time at a major Adelaide hospital reviewing the reception of an art exhibition in which one of my informants was participating. A few days were spent hanging around in the hospital corridors where the works were being displayed, and this allowed me the opportunity to see and hear the way in which the works were received by passers-by. During my time at the hospital I found that there was continual engagement with the art works on display, with both visitors and patients slowing down to examine particular artworks, and to criticise or complement the aesthetics and skill of the pieces on display. The conversations I initiated with some exhibition viewers suggested that while the art was not always understood, its presence was generally supported. One woman, who was part of a group that had come to visit a friend said that it made the hospital feel less sterile. My own observations showed that almost everyone who passed through the corridor, with the exception of staff, slowed or stopped to look at the art on display. Additionally, if people were in a group, they tended to stop for longer and engage together with the artworks. The artist informant, who was a part of the exhibition, expressed a desire for their work to contribute to a stimulating and fun environment in a space that is usually considered to be boring and sterile. She hoped that the work would be well received but considered that the therapeutic value of being stimulated either way was the main objective of the exercise.

The social facilitation role, of which art in health is an element, also expressed itself in the way that artists assumed their position as obliged participants in other community enrichment and education activities that were seen to have a socially therapeutic impact within their communities. This included opening their studios to the public, participating in free workshops and public art exhibitions, undertaking the visual beautification of their communities, and donating their artworks to charities or for other worthy events or places. The community benefit that artists engage with, particularly in terms of community regeneration and economic development, has been identified and discussed by social researchers working in a range of urban and rural locations (Crawshaw & Gkartzios 2016, Crawshaw 2015, Coombs 2015, Kester 2011, Schacter 2014, Vickery 2009, Jayne 2004, Miles and Paddison 2005), and the debates around the value of art in terms of community development and wellbeing outcomes, remain ongoing. Within my own research, however, a high level of enthusiasm and energy was displayed by my informants who undertook these more socially philanthropic functions, and the functions that they engaged with were experienced as positive activities that contributed to their identity as socially aware individuals who were invested in the achievement of social change within their communities. My informants also considered that the socially facilitative and therapeutic role they assumed was part of a more externally imposed social obligation inherent within the artist's public role and, in this capacity, the process of performing the role of artist compelled these individuals to enter into an implicit social 'contract', as producers of cultural artefacts that provided material and ideological support for the maintenance and renewal of their society.

3.5. CONCLUSION

The cultural facilitation role that artists assume forms a key part of the ways in which my informants understood themselves as being more than just skilled individuals working in the artistic field. This chapter described and explored the ways in which that positioning of the self as artist encompassed both their internal private worlds, whilst working in concert with the external social positioning of this special group. The becoming and being of an artist was positioned as being predicated upon the integration of these factors, rather than the primacy of just one or the other. In bringing together the various elements to demonstrate the ways in which the artists I worked with saw their development into, and maintenance of, the role of artist, my informants understood their initial interest in becoming an artist as something that stemmed from an inherent internal drive, an artistic imperative. This led them to understand themselves as individuals who have a need to

communicate their world and their experiences through the vehicle of symbolic and material representation. This imperative to become an artist didn't have a concrete timeline attached to it, with some informants starting the artistic journey early in lives, but others leaving it until much later. The consensus, however, was that once that journey had begun, there was a sense of rightness about it, and often a sense of relief at having discovered a way to express themselves in an effective way – a kind of self therapy if you will.

My informants also agreed that an important 'inherent' trait found in artists, which contributes to their unique and special role, was their talent. Talent, which was most often characterised as something artists are born with, was seen as an essential component to having the potential to be a good artist in the eyes of my informants. There were, however, a number of factors that played into the notion of talent that impacted on both the perceived 'goodness' of the artist, and the actual success an artist achieves in this field. Artists cited the importance of discipline and hard work as essential elements in the making of a skilled and legitimate craftsperson. As is common across the social spectrum, the notion of developing talent through hard work and discipline is seen somewhat as a moral issue, and this is evident in the artist's own conception of their development in the field. The moral elements of talent were also explored in the way in which my informants spoke of their relative success compared to others in this field. This was an emotive issue, as there can only be so many very successful practitioners in the field, but the sub-culture and its individuals maintain a sense of professional legitimacy by extending the aforementioned moral framework of talent and discipline to the arena of success. In this capacity, two key elements emerged that provided an explanatory model for the way in which some artists, who may not be perceived as having as much talent or discipline, became successful when others didn't. The two key concepts were integrity and charisma. The artists I worked with provided explanations as to how success was possible if an individual's personal integrity was compromised through choosing to create artworks that had no artistic or social merit. The other possibility for success in the absence of legitimate skill or talent was the attribute of charisma, in which it was said some artists became unfairly successful simply because they have attractive or charismatic personalities and an above average ability to develop and maintain social and professional networks. The explanatory framework around the concept of talent is one that provides a compelling way to understand the culturally sanctioned moral underpinnings of artist's practice, but also provides a protective mechanism for artists who do not experience high levels of success in the field, as it allows them to explain that misfortune in a way that externalises the cause for that misfortune.

Furthermore, in exploring the experience of being an artist it was evident that there was a strong imperative to assume responsibility for being a cultural facilitator and mediator. This role was described as being multifaceted and was seen to be expressed at various levels depending on the individual artist. It was clear, however, that all the artists I worked with expressed an engagement with revealing and exploring elements of the social world, and in being invested in contributing to a healthier and more cohesive society. It was demonstrated that this role is one that is not only driven by the individual artist, but has a strong social basis that is underpinned by the implicit social contract that is applied to artists, in which they are given unique social latitude to explore and articulate controversial issues and live unconventional lifestyles, but are also expected to contribute to the processes of cultural renewal and maintenance. This again demonstrated the strong integration that exists between the artist's individual perceptions of their agency, and the culturally given norms that exist with respect to this unique social category.

Bringing together all of these various factors that lead to the initiation, development and maintenance of the artist, one can make a strong case for the role of socially structured tradition and social obligation, as being key elements in the way that artists' professional and private lives play out. These key elements incorporate the way in which artists utilise their skills, spaces and material, the relationships that they develop and maintain, and the attitudes and moral frameworks that support the legitimacy of their practice and inform their understanding of what they do. The next chapter expands on these factors by providing an account of the practical doing of art making, again looking at the practice against the framework of the social norms, obligations and privileges that are assigned to artists, and upon which a mythology of 'the artist' is maintained as a cultural phenomena.

CHAPTER 4

DOING ART

4.1. INTRODUCTION

The process of making an artwork encompasses a number of stages and is characterised by the application of many decisions and tools that impact on the final product and its capacity to tell the story that it has been designed to tell. This chapter explores some of the core cultural factors that influence the process of making artworks from the initial conceptualisation through to the making of the material object that is designed to be symbolic and meaningful and visually stimulating. I explore the ways in which traditional or novel concepts, aesthetics, tools, techniques and materials, which are used by the artist, are applied and understood by the artists themselves. I argue, in discussing and explicating this central area of an artist's life, is that the practices undertaken, and the decisions made, by the artists within this context are strongly influenced by a range of factors that are associated with the social norms established within the art world paradigm, including through embodied pedagogical connections from art school teachers to their students. The processes undertaken by the artist during the making of an artwork can be seen to be a continuation of a tradition of art making, which while having variations across different disciplines, demonstrates a strongly similar framework for the development and reproduction of a structure of aesthetic and technical discipline and practice. It is, therefore, from within this broad traditional artistic framework that the more specific tools, methods and materials are conceptualised, talked about, applied and appropriated during the course of an artist's work activities. A key focus of this discussion, which provides more context for understanding the practices being undertaken, is in the consideration of the body in the process of making. The integration of the disciplined and ritual utilisation of the body, the application of culturally appropriate tools, materials and methods, and the overlaying effects of individual agency and intersubjectivity, work to maintain a sense of coherence for the professional and social practice of artists.

This chapter is concerned with establishing a link between art making and a theory of practice that highlights the way in which personal decisions and actions, which often appear

to have a discreet basis in individual agency and the expression of identity, are shaped by the wider social systems and traditions of the art world. This discussion attempts to explicate these relations, and highlight the artist's connection with a wider social art world paradigm, in terms of providing a discussion on the three broad areas of doing art – learning to make art, creatively conceptualising and planning artworks, and the intersubjective and embodied practice of making art. In this capacity, I explore the choices that artists make whilst working within their highly autonomous work context, in order to highlight the ways in which these choices help to reproduce the social norms of practice within their artistic fields and disciplines. I argue that the practices, tools, techniques and methodologies that are chosen and applied by the artist, whilst always having an arguably obvious practical purpose, also work more implicitly on the deeper social level to reinforce the identity and status of the artist as having a legitimate right to a place in the community of artists. This includes maintaining and performing established artistic or discipline based knowledge, history, tradition and pedagogy as a means through which to perpetuate their feeling of belonging to the art world structure. In seeming opposition to this, however, there are examples of the ways in which the agency of the artist as an individual also comes into play, integrating with, and shaping the way in which conscious choices of material and method are made. Within this context it is possible for there to be starkly different choices made during the production of an artwork, and these choices may quite specifically refute or subvert the artistic culture, history and traditions. While this refutation may seem to weaken my previous assertions, I make the point that the challenging of social norms is a strong component of both artistic practice and is a feature of our society in general, which impacts on the formation of new cultural forms and practices.

My field research upheld the view that the process of making art is one that is steeped in sociality and tradition, and this is evident in the ethnography I present. The ethnography shows that my informants have specific discipline based ways in which they work, and are subject to the discipline's norms that impact on the choices they make around the methods, tools and materials that are used in their art production practice. I argue that this socially constituted making process is part of a continuum of embodied and symbolic practice, which values some chosen forms and processes of the discipline and the art world, over others. This induction into the social norms and traditions, which supports and shapes art making practice is, to a large extent, already part of the western mythology of what it is to be an artist, but for the artists themselves it is generally enhanced and structured through the processes of education and modelling. This chapter, therefore, begins with a discussion

focussing on the role of education as a means through which art-making practice is taught as a materially focused and embodied discipline, which places a value on the dichotomous and contrasting ideals of social norms and tradition combined with individual agency.

Following on from this, I undertake a more specific exploration of the way in which the practical conceptualisation and making happens, including introducing and exploring the various stages and processes of making art as seen through the practices of, and discussion with, the artists I worked with. My aim is to conceptually bring together the varying processes and methods used across the specific disciplines in order to develop an understanding of them as embodied holistic practices, which are strongly shaped by art culture and tradition, but are often presented and expressed as being solely the product of the artist's individual practice and agency. Theoretically, this chapter underpins its discussion through reference to the anthropological research focusing on the experience of everyday practice within the creative arts (see, for example Sharpe et al 2005, Myers 2004, Wallis 2004, Mullins 2003, Farkas 1999, Gell 1998, Marchart 1998, Morphy 1995, Brunstein 1995, Danto 1991, Becker 1984). More generally I consider anthropological material dealing with concepts of social practice and experience, of embodiment and intersubjectivity, and of creativity, in order to support and contextualise my discussions and ethnographic material relating to the development and application of my informant's artistic skills, cultural preferences and understandings, and in relation to the enactment of their embodied and ritual practices during the making of their artworks.

4.2. LEARNING TO DO

As discussed in the previous chapter the process of becoming a practitioner of any professional discipline is one that is generally accompanied by the initial identification of talent or aptitude followed by the application of an education or skills development process, which develops the capabilities required for the particular role at hand. Within this context there are a number of anthropological studies of vocational education processes, which discuss the development of professional identities, including those that map the processes of becoming an expert practitioner (Ericsson et al 1993) and those that focus on vocational and professional education processes and institutions (Brockmann 2010, Ecclestone 2007, Colley et al. 2003). The process of becoming a professional artist, in the practical sense, is not much different with formal education in the field of visual arts usually being undertaken at the tertiary level, at a range of educational levels, including from a basic diploma all the way to a PhD. In a non vocational context art education is considered a core component of

all standard Australian primary and high school curricula (SACSA Arts Curriculum 2014), and it is also common for hobby courses to be offered to both children and adults in a range of settings (see Worker's Education Association 2014), for people who are interested in gaining a better understanding of, and skills in, the practice of art making. A typical Bachelor's degree course will incorporate a number of relatively standard elements that are considered essential to the developing artist. These elements include tuition in a major and minor discipline, drawing, art history, concept development and design, and elective subjects in any of the other disciplines being practiced within the organisation. The courses are designed to be a preparation for a career in visual arts (or aligned industries) and, therefore, they provide practical, conceptual and social inductions into this world.¹⁰

Within the cohort of informants I worked with the role of education in the development of an artist's professional skill set and identity was one that was the subject of some interest over the course of my research. With the exception of just one of my informants, all had undertaken some kind of formal tertiary arts education, and most considered the education they received to be an important element in acquiring the skills that are necessary to make artworks, and that were perceived to have the appropriate aesthetic, technical, social and economic attributes. My informants' focus, with regard to undertaking an art education, was in relation to its importance as a means through which they could learn become skilled and disciplined artists. Their focus on the value of education correlates with the data available on the educational background of practising artists in Australia, which states that the majority of people working in the field have some form of formal educational qualifications (Throsby and Zednick 2010:26).

¹⁰ One key South Australian institute that provides such an arts education introduces their degree course in the following way:

‘You will develop the skills to work as a practising artist, craft person, or in allied work. The degree focuses on the development of practical skills in a workshop studio environment. It provides graduates with the technical, aesthetic, historical and business skills to work as artists, designers, craft persons or in allied work where creativity and making skills are a valued resource. You will acquire the skills and knowledge to produce artworks that may be sold through galleries, shops or directly from your studio. You will also gain the skills to undertake commissions and work cooperatively on community projects. The Bachelor of Creative Arts (Visual Arts) is designed to equip you with the understanding and practical skills that enable you to investigate and develop your artistic practice in a chosen medium in the visual arts. You will be able to explore practical issues and techniques through studio work and will develop the capacity to analyse concepts of creativity and visual thinking, and gain experience in the creative process’. (Tafe on ACA 2015)

In my cohort of informants, there were only two artists who did not have comprehensive arts training, and one of these individuals had taken up other types of training in an effort to gain the technical skills that he deemed as being important in order to undertake the practice within his chosen discipline. The artist, Rick, who took up his art practice after a successful IT career, did do some drawing classes at the tertiary level but primarily undertook more technical training in the field of metal fabrication, welding and technical engineering. Rick considered that these were the skills that would be most useful to him as a developing artist in the metal sculpture field. Rick also reflected, however, on a sense of missing out on various aspects of a visual arts education that had been enjoyed by many of his peers, and upon reflecting on that deficit, he had expressed a desire to fill in the gaps in his education through taking up design and painting classes in his spare time. The other informant who had not undertaken a formal arts education was Hamish who remained completely self taught. Hamish displayed a number of unusual characteristics in terms of his artistic style, subject and technique, including using a combination of highly expressionistic techniques, and domestic painting materials, to paint representations of non-traditional subjects (such as muscle cars). Hamish also displayed a range of non-traditional ways of ‘working out’ technical problems related to his art practice. He explains:

I just started painting seriously because I always liked it and people told me I was pretty good at it...I am from a farming family and we never really worried too much about formal education, we just worked out how to do stuff ourselves if we didn't know already. I do the same thing with my art and I pretty much taught myself how to paint by reading, experimenting and trying things out. Living on a big property, I have heaps of room to try things...and around here [country South Australia] there is different stuff that I am thinking about when I paint. It's pretty much all about the land and the community here, so I paint 'pics' of that kind of stuff...animals and nature...but also do people in groups or by themselves...I don't use typical art materials either. I paint on canvas and I do use paint but the paint I use is house paint that I pick up from the hardware store. I buy my canvas from a local guy around here and I worked out how to build the frames and do the stretching in my own way. I've seen how most artists do it but I didn't have the same tools so I just worked out how I could make the same thing with what I had. What I make is pretty much the same as the ready-made canvases you can buy from the art supply shops and its way cheaper for me to make them myself...so, yeah, I just really do what I like. I take the bits of the art world that I really like (like expressionism) and just make it my own without having to worry about all the really wanky stuff that goes along with it.

(Howe-Piening 2006)

Hamish's experience highlights the strong influence that the cultural and embodied experience of an arts education can have on the way in which art making happens, and on the way in which these processes are thought about.

The majority of the artists I worked with considered that the process of learning to manipulate materials and tools, and to apply discipline specific techniques, was one that was of primary importance in learning to be a skilled artist who would be recognised as such within the art world. Christina described this as being able to ‘speak the same language’ in terms of the way in which particular themes were presented or traditional approaches adapted. For example, she discusses how it is acceptable to use objects in art that are ready made, such as the kitchenware she uses in her *Lace Kitchen* series (Figure 1), but, in her opinion, the objects must have evidence of technical skill and creativity applied to them in order to be considered legitimate as art. The practice of using ready-made objects has a history dating back to Duchamp’s famous artwork *Fountain* (1917).¹¹



Figure 1.
Roast Pan in *Lace Kitchen* Exhibition, 2005
Photo courtesy of the artist

¹¹ This work was a signed, but otherwise unmodified, urinal that was created within the context of the Dadaist movement, which was essentially started in Europe as an anti-war and anti-establishment movement after the end of World War 1 (Maftai 2010). *Fountain* was a challenge to the art world in that it defied all the traditional elements of what made an artwork valid – that is an aesthetic object that is very obviously the product of a superior native and developed skill set (talent) combined with discipline and creativity. The missing factor in ‘Fountain’ was, of course, that there was no obvious element of beauty or skill involved in its making, and the object itself was symbolically referential to the baser functions of life, which was seen to be a defiance of traditional high culture values.

The introduction of works such as *Fountain* into the modernist art culture created a more conceptual tradition for artists to work within, but while the use of these ready-made objects (also known as assemblages) now has an established place in the art world, it is still the prevailing thought amongst many practicing artists that it would be lazy and unskilled to present such an object without first applying one's professional skill and creativity to it in some way.

In the case of *Lace Kitchen* Christina had chosen some old fashioned metal and enamelled pans (including the roast pan pictured below) and created an elaborate pattern on the top and side by drilling a series of small holes. These holes were then lit internally by candles and all of the pieces, which were made in the same way and were considered variations on a theme, were then exhibited together as a series. It was in this way that Christina's skilled and culturally specific conceptual and creative treatment of these ordinary objects transformed them into legitimate artworks. Christina's opinion was that she had done her time at art school, had developed a range of skills and technical capabilities, and had completed a number of exhibitions in which these skills were at the forefront of the works she presented, so she was free to make works that were more conceptual and 'socially interesting to more people' (Howe-Piening 2006).

In addition to the notion of legitimacy, an art education, and its attendant spatial environment, also teaches developing artists how to move, speak and look like an artist in a more social sense. This somewhat implicit form of education that occurs within the art school is evident through the way in which the student is communicated with and taught in class, through the social interactions the student engages with during breaks, and through the models that are held up as ideals. I argue that the combination of these factors demonstrates a strong embodied initiation effect that supports the emerging role of artist as an holistic social phenomena. Atkinson describes the process of embodied learning, as experienced in an Opera master class as:

processes of transmission within workplace socialisation, and of the reproduction of distinctive modes of apperception [in which] 'Traditions' of performance and enactment, of vision and manual skill, are inscribed within the socialised competence of the practitioner...[and] practical skills are embodied through the socially organised enculturation of the senses (Atkinson 2013:491).

This interpretation aligns with the descriptions of the kinds of embodied and socialised processes that were commonplace during the arts education of my informants. For example,

when working with painter Barrie he identified his arts education as the place where he first started practicing his strong ritual and rhythmic process of painting that characterised all of his sessions in the studio. The setting up and placement of the brushes and painting media, the mixing of the colours, and the movement back and forth from the painting at regular intervals, were all practices that had a practical logic to them, but were carried out in a specific way that upon further inquiry was found to have its basis in what happened during painting classes at art school in the 1950's. Barrie's atelier model of arts education favoured the studio practice over other more theoretical forms of education, and his experience of learning to make art involved being led and 'shaped' by an authoritative model (the tutor), and working with other novice artists in the painting studio for four full days a week. This intense traditional environment, which encouraged learning through action, and visual and conceptual reflection, supported the creation and maintenance of patterns of thought and behaviour that Barrie considers to be the 'right' way to make art. Similar kinds of ritual processes of learning were also experienced by the other artists I worked with, regardless of the era in which they attended art school.

The socialised and embodied model of learning to be an artist was also demonstrated to be accompanied by a range of other entrenched and specific traditions, which focused as much on the transmission of skills as on the disciplining of bodies, and the enculturation of the minds applying those skills. The figure of the art teacher within the structured environment of the art studio is an essential influencing factor on the modelling and transmission of ideal technical and social skills to the artist. Barrie described his teachers as being highly influential to the way that he still practices, and this was mirrored in the experiences of my other informants who considered the combined impact of the teachers, the art spaces, and the associated social relations, to be the elements that had a significant impact on their development as artists. Frizz iterated Barrie's feelings when discussing her own experience:

it is a pretty heady experience, as a new art student, coming into the painting studio with it all its smells and colours, and being greeted by an expert painter who is cool, confident, and encourages artistic freedom, exploration and resistance, while at the same time instilling that deep respect for the long held traditions of the field. I just really wanted to be him in the beginning and I watched and followed everything he did pretty carefully to get it right.

(Howe-Piening 2006)

Similarly, Atkinson reflects on the role of the authority in pedagogy and asserts that the 'body [of the teacher] is a source of instruction: performers are expected to develop their own expressive acts partly on the basis of imitating the displays of the director [as teacher]

himself/herself' (2013:10). This kind of learning experience, which has the characteristic of an apprenticeship, has an holistic impact on the student in a sociocultural sense as it is a 'style of learning immersion [delivered] in a learning environment that, in addition to facilitating technical know-how, structures the practitioner's hard-earned acquisition of social knowledge, worldviews and moral principles that denote membership and status in a trade' (Marchand 2008:246).

Discussions with my informants on what happens in the art classroom often focused on the two aligned areas of teaching and studio practice, which were seen as a critical combination for the development of high level artistic skills. Teaching was described as appearing quite informal at times, but upon explication my informants described a range of practices that covered all the essential requirements of safe and appropriate use of material and techniques within the specific discipline. Fiona describes a typical learning session in the jewellery studio:

When we were learning something new we would all be called to gather around the tutor's jewellery bench (or other work station depending on what was happening) and then he would start with a verbal explanation of what we were doing, including talking about what materials and tools will be required, and other alternatives to what we are learning (like when we were learning to set cabochons with a bezel setting he explained that we would also learn to make claw settings and they would be better for setting some stones and cut types). We were always told about the safety aspects of what we were doing..things like pointing out the dangers of chemicals we were working with, or telling us how important it was to use tools and equipment correctly to avoid getting hurt...After the introductory talky bits the tutor would start to actually make the thing, carefully talking us through all the stages, encouraging us to take notes, pointing out the particular way to orientate our bodies or grip a particular tool...When the demonstration was over we would all go back to our own benches and start to make our own piece. The tutor would come around to all of us while we were working and give us tips, correct our method, or point out things that we had missed. It was really strange to me that he could easily see things that took me ages to recognise...yep, it was quite taxing getting to know how to use the tools and work with the metal at first. Some nights I would go home and my neck and arms were really aching badly from having to hold myself in a weird way for hours. Now my body is used to it and it feels completely natural.

(Howe-Piening 2007)

As can be seen from this example, the studio teaching process involves explanation, demonstration, practice and critical guidance as the basis for developing the knowledge and skills of an artist. When asked how the embodied studio learning experiences have shaped her practice today, Fiona considered that after spending so much time actually 'doing the learning, not just learning the learning', she now just automatically works at making art without having to put any effort into thinking about the way to position her body or use her tools. This ingrained and automatic skill and knowledge of her chosen discipline is something that is the desired and expected outcome of an embodied educational process.

This is exemplified by O'Connor who, in describing her experience of learning to become a glassblower, maps her development of skills and knowledge from being a struggling beginner to being able to make an object easily without thinking through every step. In describing a watershed moment during which she became aware of the naturalness of her glassblowing processes, she had developed what she described as 'a *subsidiary awareness* of the blowpipe' (O'Connor 2007:129). She quotes Polanyi in explaining that the

objects of our subsidiary awareness are not watched in themselves, we watch something else while keeping intensely aware of them...[and] tools . . . can never lie in the field of . . . operations, they remain necessarily on our side of it, forming part of ourselves, the operating persons...We pour ourselves out into them and assimilate them as parts of our own existence. We accept them existentially by dwelling in them.

(Polanyi cited in O'Connor 2007:130).

Wilf describes the modern pedagogical institutions of the arts as places where 'educators attempt to reproduce the socially and culturally structured world of their practice, [in which]...neophytes learn more than factual knowledge by being exposed to and participating in such events...they learn to inhabit the genred role of the creative artist, which consists of a specific speech register, bodily comportment, dress code, and set of gender norms, along with various other dimensions of cultural know-how (Wilf 2014:402).

While predominantly being seen as the primary way in which individuals were able to develop a range of unique technical skills and knowledge needed to practice the art medium/s of their choice, the purpose of a formal education in visual art was understood and characterised in a number of other ways that were valued by the developing artists. The education was also seen as a way in which an individual would be inducted into the culture of being an artist, including gaining an understanding of the history and traditions of the fields, having the relationships, rituals and norms of behaviour modelled for them, and making connections with other individuals who are likely to become their extended networks. Fiona's opinions of her time at art school were relatively representative of most of the artists I worked with in that she thought her education:

was a bit of a revelation to me how much I actually learnt while I was at art school...learning how to do all the making stuff was great but it was so much more than that. It was an amazing environment to go to everyday because it was a place where everyone felt pretty special, where thinking outside the box and being a rebel was just...you know...expected...I changed a lot in the three years I went to art school...the way I thought about social stuff, the way I dressed and behaved, the people I hung out with...and yeah...my ability to work really hard and use what I learned to be a better artist. (Howe-Piening 2007)

Having some kind of tertiary education was also seen as a way in which a practicing artist could display social recognition and validation as a professional, from both within and external to their chosen field. This was initially expressed through a talent based selection process for entry that is attached to most art schools, but extends throughout the duration of the course, through both formal and informal means of evaluating and accepting an individual's talent, creativity and skills.¹² The process of being educated to be an artist is an important element in the way in which my informants saw themselves as having developed the requisite culture, skills and relationships to work in the complex and often conflicting world of the professional artist. The education that is provided through formal processes, and through the enactment of skills, models and relationships within those formal educational spaces, provides the social and pedagogical context for artists to be inducted into the traditional ways of being a practicing artist. This social and embodied underpinning is further evident during the processes of creatively conceiving of, and planning artworks, which is the subject of the following section.

4.3. CONCEPTS, DESIGN AND CREATIVITY

The making of an artwork always starts with its conceptualisation. Conceptualisation and design are two separate, but interrelated, processes that occur before the hands-on making of an artwork begins. As skills in their own right they are considered to be both essential and well established processes within the visual arts, and ones which are accompanied by a set of well established methods for developing an initial idea into something that is artistically viable and can practically be materially realised. In the visual arts context, concept development and design are processes that are taught and developed in formal education settings, as central skills for becoming a successful artist.¹³

¹² For example, to gain entry into the University of Melbourne's Bachelor of Fine Arts course, selection is talent-based and includes a 'selection process for each specialisation includes: - Animation: Test and interview - Contemporary Music: Audition and interview - Dance: Audition and interview - Film and Television: Test and interview - Music Theatre: Audition and interview - Production: Written support material, interview and workshop - Screenwriting: Test and interview - Theatre Practice: Audition, interview and workshop - Visual Art: Interview and folio.' (University of Melbourne, 2015)

¹³ What can be considered to be a typical description of an art school concept development course, and its objectives, is given below:

'This core course focuses on the generation and formulation of ideas, and challenges you to reflectively consider the various ways these ideas can be presented to communicate effectively to the audience in order to produce engaging, informative and entertaining creative projects. You will acquire a working knowledge of the forms and elements that creative practitioners have at their disposal which can be creatively harnessed during the conceptual development phase of a project, and which can inform the selection of content suitable for a range of project possibilities.

Footnote continued on next page.

The notion of teaching concept development and design to arts students, therefore, is seen as a way to harness and discipline their skill in finding and using ideas creatively with the desired outcome to develop their ability to consistently apply this attribute to the making of visual art objects. Creativity, when discussed within an arts context, is considered to be an essential element in the process of art making. Even though the concept of creativity is regularly used, both formally and informally, across the social spectrum it remains a complicated and multifaceted notion to unpack. Given that creativity is considered to be such a central element in the conception of an artwork, and because it suffers from some difficulty in being easily defined, I devote the first part of this section to briefly exploring the idea of creativity as a contributor to the art making process before progressing on to describing the concept development and design phases that precede the physical making processes.

While the process of concept development is one that is considered to be able to be taught to students as a learned skill, being good at concept development is intrinsically tied to notions about the creative capacity of an artist. When discussing the process of concept development with my informants, it was unanimously described as a creative process that was the essential precursor to making successful artworks in terms of their perceived artistic merit, their ability to hold and transmit meaning and their critical success. The explanations of what creativity entailed in this context, however, varied and most artists found it difficult to fully articulate the range of implicit meanings that exist within the term. Commonly held beliefs about creative people often characterise them as individuals who ‘express unusual thoughts, who are interesting and stimulating - in short, people who appear to unusually bright...who experience the world in novel and original ways... whose perceptions are fresh, whose judgements are insightful, who may make important discoveries that only they know about...who have changed our culture in some important way’ (Csikszentmihalyi 1996: 25-26). In this description, the presence of creativity within

The course facilitates the development of successful strategies in the research, development and production of creative projects. The ability to take an idea from inspiration to fruition is one of the key components of a successful creative project. In the 21st century, practitioners within the creative arts industries have access to an ever-growing array of media resources and new technologies. While this sheer breadth and depth can be daunting, if approached from a creative perspective, these tools can be harnessed in powerful ways for research, collaboration and production. The knowledge gained in this course will be applied to the development of an original concept proposal for a major project... In this course you will be assessed on the creativity and execution of your ideas.’ (RMIT 2015)

the person is said to be an inherent part of them and is something that has a strong sense of desirability. While it is seen as something that is valued by, and has a positive impact on, society, this interpretation is somewhat lacking in terms of its understanding of the social elements of creativity. In this discussion, therefore, I provide a focus on both the social and individual elements associated with creativity.

Visual arts are a key part of what is known as the 'creative industries' in Australia. This label clearly places this phenomena we call creativity at the centre of society's, and artists', understanding of what it is to be a legitimate practicing artist within our social paradigm. This has been explored by anthropologists who have been interested in the way embodied education supports the development and transmission of creativity (Sabeti 2015, Schacter 2014, Burton 2009, Parezzo 2006), and on how the practice of being creative is experienced and understood by those who practice it (Wilf 2014, Moeran 2011, Liep 2001, Plattner 1996, Becker 1984). The artists I worked with considered creativity to be a central element in the arts and in their own lives and, in this capacity they characterised creativity as a concept that is difficult to define, but is intrinsically connected to the way they imagined themselves as artists. When asked if they see themselves as creative individuals all the artists I worked with agreed with that. Upon exploring this idea more, the notion of identity and creativity was central to their understanding of themselves as artists in a quite holistic way, which aligns with my assertion relating to the all-encompassing nature of being an artist in our society –a profession that is also regarded, socially speaking, as being a lifestyle and an identity. When artists speak of creativity, they focus on its application and impact on their lives in a number of areas that include their professional practice, but also their private lives, environments and relationships. This capacity for, and application of, creativity in all aspects of their lives is seen as a given trait that allows them to identify and enhance the potential of the conceptual and the material world. Ann explained how she sees all aspects of her life as being impacted by her innate creativity:

with my creativity, I think I see the world a little differently from a lot of other people. I am always turning everything into a creative project in some way...I see my whole house and garden like that...if it is an empty space I want to make it into something kind of stimulating, interesting to look at in some way...or maybe it should say something...it happens when I am out as well. I always see things that could be changed, or used in a different way. I guess it's about seeing the possibility of a thing in a way most people don't

(Howe-Piening 2006)

Ann discussed her relationship with creativity as one that clearly positions this attribute as part of her inherent identity. She uses it every day as though compelled to do so, and sees

the application of creativity in her life as something that sets her apart from the mainstream, in which the adherence to more set boundaries for manipulating the world are commonplace. For example, Ann showed me a number of her photo albums, and while many contained photos that fit neatly into the standard usage of this mode of recording, a number of these albums contained raw and emotive family photos and self portraits that would be considered confronting within the usual paradigm for such artefacts. Creativity, therefore, can be seen to be both a social and personal phenomena that contributes to an artist's all encompassing social and personal identity, can be applied in all areas of their lives, and contributes to their unique social status.

The conceptualisation of an artwork relies heavily on a structured form of creativity that is learned and applied either independently or through an educational process. The practice of concept development within the framework of arts education is often centred around the continual identification and recording of ideas and potential themes and objects, usually through the use of a journal or other recording mechanism. The ongoing application of creativity in all aspects of life is a central part of successful concept development because the constant practice of seeing the possibilities in the world around them, ensures that the artist has the capability to identify and harness potential ideas for their artworks. Fiona described the way in which concept development was taught at her art school.

they taught us how to find and develop ideas, mostly through keeping a journal. Everyone had a journal for that particular class and also one for each of our major or minor subjects as well. I found it a bit confronting to keep a journal at first because I felt that the ideas I was putting in there were quite forced and I spent a lot of time desperately trying to find things to add to it so, that when it was handed up as part of the assessment, I wouldn't look like I had no ideas. I am not sure when or how things changed, but after a while of struggling with the journal using it became a really natural thing and I would always be writing down random things in there, doing little doodles, sticking in notes that I had written down while I was out somewhere...yeah, it's funny how things changed but now I really love using a journal and it's great to be able to go back through all the ideas and connect with some that I didn't end up doing anything with when I first recorded them...so the idea with the class was to collect all of these ideas and then find one that would be developed, in a more structured way, so that we could make them for assessment at the end of the semester. Once we had our ideas we were encouraged to play with them, find examples of art that might inspire us, think about and experiment with materials and construction ideas and, of course, we wrote everything down in fine detail. Everything we did to eventually make our pieces was submitted as a part of the assessment so it was really important to be as detailed as possible.

(Howe-Piening 2006)

The practice of using a journal and other means of recording ideas continued for Fiona, and is one that she feels is highly useful in her practice. The difficulty that she first experienced when adopting the journaling practice highlights the importance of assuming a disciplined

approach to learning to be an artist in order to shape thinking and practice on an ongoing basis. Journaling was also utilised, in some form or other, by the majority of my other informants, and while each artist tends to develop their own style of recording and expressing ideas, the basic practice of writing down thoughts and producing, or reproducing, images, diagrams or processes was a common thread across all journaling practice.

The concept development process was seen by the artists I worked with as a function that was critical for harnessing and broadly structuring the raw creativity that the artist possesses and applies in their work practice. In this capacity the process provides a range of tools from which artists can choose to capture, collate, develop and analyse their ideas. Jeweller Fiona considered that the processes, including the production of visual journals, relies heavily on ‘thinking about the world differently, and exploring ideas more laterally...so that I can find really engaging ways to say what I want through my art.’ The logical progression that follows the process of concept development is that of design. In broad terms it can be described as the structured planning and development of a blueprint that guides the making of an artwork. The design of an artwork, as described by my informants, usually starts with a concept being chosen from the range of ideas that have been recorded, explored and chosen in the concept development phase. This basic idea is then further developed through a structured process involving choosing and documenting plans for materials, dimensions and construction processes, in order to develop a realisable design, and planning documentation that will act as a guide for making the object. The process of design relies on a number of key factors in order to be successful. These factors are the capacity to ensure that the original idea or concept can be maintained, that the design will result in an artwork that is culturally readable and relevant, and that the design is actually possible to make with the resources, materials, skills and tools that the artist has access to. Fiona described her design process as something which ‘is absolutely essential if I want to get the piece right’. In the following account, she discusses the processes and elements of developing a design for a ring she made, which demonstrates design’s key role in creating a link between the creative and informal conceptual activities undertaken by the artist with the practical and technical making of an object. The process focused on the making of specific decisions about the production of artworks in terms of choosing from a broad range of potential materials and techniques which could then be creatively applied or combined in a variety of ways to suit Fiona’s needs, and those of the object (as determined by Fiona). The materials and techniques that were chosen were dependent on a number of

factors, of which cultural elements played a significant role in terms of adhering to, or referencing, traditional materials, tools or techniques belonging to Fiona's disciplines of Jewellery and Sculpture.

I decided to make a 'warehouse ring' as the first part of a series of pieces that would be inspired by urban architecture. For a while I had been noticing a lot of really interesting buildings as I walked around town, and I really liked some of the old warehouses and factories that are still being used in parts of town. I had a lot of photos and sketches of those kinds of buildings and had done a bit of research into the kinds of stuff that went on there. Lots of it was metal fabrication funnily enough. I thought that was a nice kind of juxtaposition in a way...I decided to start with a warehouse inspired ring and had a number of sketches of different possibilities for the way it would look. I ended up deciding on making a box ring, which is basically a chunky ring made like a box, so it's hollow. One of my sketches was based on a building I saw that had a row of windows under a corresponding row of chimneys and this repetition formed the basis of my design. When making the design I used the original conceptual sketch I had made and, using graph paper and ruler, I drew a scale drawing of the ring in the actual size I wanted and from a number of aspects. I then drew each of the separate pieces I would need for the construction (5 in this case), and then worked on each of those, mapping out the design and size and detail. Lastly I made a list of all the steps I need to do in order. This actually takes a while to do as I usually miss quite a few things before I get it right. It really helps, though, because it gives me a guide for the work that is logical and efficient in that it includes the best order to do stuff to avoid having to wait for anything. The rest was the making stuff and with the plan I knew what materials I needed and I could just gather them and start the actual making. The ring I eventually made was constructed in silver and had front and back flat plates that were cut out with the finger holes at the bottom, and with the shape of a square building with windows and chimneys at the top. The box and ring components were soldered to the plates and then, once that was tidied up, I made a cuttlefish cast panel for the top of the ring, which fit in between the two rows of chimneys (the depth of the ring) and had a rough kind of industrial texture to it. The materials and techniques I chose to use were pretty standard ones in jewellery making, but the way I applied them was to give the ring a kind of industrial feel to it...rough textures, not much polish, blackened areas to highlight the grittiness of it. While it looked quite textured and not very shiny and polished, I still took a lot of care in the construction of the ring...in the way I cut and soldered and filed things, the way all the edges came together and the flatness and level of the metal. These are things that I would never compromise on 'cos [sic] I want to be able to look at it later and not just see all the mistakes and shortcuts. I also don't want my fellow jewellers thinking I don't have good skills (smiles).

(Howe-Piening 2007)

It is clear from reading Fiona's account of her design process that there are strong social elements that had an impact on the design process and outcome of an artwork. The social impact can be seen in the way in which materials, tools and methods, that are associated with the art practice, are chosen, understood and applied. As a routine part of working within a strongly materially based profession, Fiona, and her fellow visual artists, work with materials, tools and techniques in a way that is highly conscious at one level, and also deeply naturalised at another. As is evident in Fiona's description of her ring, the high level of consciousness that is applied to the production of an artwork ranges from making carefully thought out decisions about the character and the nature of the materials that will

be used, through to the way that these materials will be applied, manipulated or presented to achieve the desired results. These choices also extend to newer forms of visual arts, such as installation art, which is a branch of sculpture that is often characterised by the use and assemblage of ordinary objects in symbolic ways. While the materials and techniques used may not generally be viewed as traditional art materials, they are chosen to have a strong symbolic and aesthetic effect, which supports and enhances the artist's idea in a way that an artistically created facsimile of that object could not. This is considered to be acceptable with the framework of the contemporary art world with the (mostly implicit) proviso being that the art be of a highly conceptual and symbolic nature, and that the artist has perceived legitimacy in the field. For example, Ann's work is highly diverse and, although her original and primary discipline is painting and drawing, she branches out regularly into the field of sculpture and the use of a broad range of materials of a non-artistic nature. For her Anticipation exhibition Ann created a series of winged feet (Figure 2.) that were constructed from wooden shoes lasts, bird feathers, shoelaces, shoe boxes, diamantes and paint. The level of technical skill required to construct such a work would be considered to be quite low, but the conceptual prowess required to successfully put together these highly symbolic and, culturally and personally, meaningful objects has the effect of compensating for the evident lack of technical artistic skill needed to make to artwork.

The pieces that Ann designed are aesthetically pleasing and interesting to look at, and they fit very effectively into the thematic schema of the exhibition, which explores Ann's rebirth as an artist after a time of uncertainty about her future. She is telling her audience that she 'has winged feet and is ready to take off'. Ann's design process for these pieces was not as rigorous as Fiona's and relied predominantly on the continual visual and material exploration and development of recorded ideas and thoughts in order to achieve the final result. In this capacity Ann created many drawings based on popular images of Mercury and created a number of prototypes before arriving at the final pieces.



Figure 2. Winged Feet (Mercury).
Howe-Piening 2007.

While Ann's process was far less structured than Fiona's, the continuum of creative development from concept to design to object, which I assert is a feature of the majority of art making practice, is still evident in the design functions she undertakes. The difference between Ann's and Fiona's processes, however, points to the range of ways in which these essential processes can be, and are, undertaken across the spectrum of art practice.

4.4. DOING ART

In their role as professional artefact producers and cultural facilitators, the aim of the visual artist is to take an intangible concept or idea, which seemingly exists exclusively in the mind and body of the artist, and transpose that concept into a theoretically possible object through the design development process. This culminates in the conversion of that concept into a tangible physical object that successfully conveys that original idea or theme, and which has a social relevance or resonance for the people viewing it. As has been discussed, the conceptual and design development processes are multi-layered, and encompasses the whole lived experience of the artist, in essence combining both their private and professional worlds into one cultural practice. This holistic world of the artist is expressed through their continual creative engagement with the possibilities that they perceive their world presents to them, and through assuming a focus on formalising those potentials through the development of artwork plans and designs. The pattern of socially relevant art practice continues beyond the planning phases of an artwork, and into the actual doing of the making process. In a previous section of this chapter I describe the education process, that is associated with learning the skills required to produce an artwork, as an embodied practice, which when explained by my informants was expressed as an intimate experience of relationship between the artist and the artworks. To the experienced artist, the making of

art incorporates the application of this automatic learned and disciplined use of material, tools and techniques in a more improvised manner that is characterised by a highly reflexive and focused evaluation, manipulation and reconstitution of those well practised elements. Wilf (2014) considers this to be an inherent part of the practice of creative work, which he describes as communicative, interactional and improvisational, the basis of which, however, he sees as being structured through socialization, apprenticeship, and pedagogy in order to form creative individuals, thus 'implicating processes of social reproduction' (Wilf 2014: 398). So while the process of doing skilled artwork seems to naturally incorporate the application of unique creative improvisation, it can be argued that this state of practice is also a key part of an embodied education process.

When reflecting on the skilled and automatic way she uses her tools when making a piece of jewellery, Fiona recalled how difficult it was to make things at the beginning of her time at art school:

it was always a struggle to remember which tools to use for what, the correct way to hold the tools and use them so that nothing was damaged...I remember having to spend such a long time filing pieces of metal, and being so worried about not doing it right...now I just automatically pick up the right file and I can 'see' the metal very clearly...every little burr or wonky edge is immediately obvious to me. I couldn't do that before and my teachers would often be pointing things out to me that I hadn't seen.

(Howe-Piening 2006)

Fiona's experience is supported further by Elizabeth Hodson's ethnographic work with Icelandic artists, which revealed similar understandings of the way in which embodied processes impact on the way artists operate. When discussing the practice of one informant, Hodson explained a way in which the artist assumed an artistic state of being:

Margrét described to me how she would go out and look around her in order to be able to work. She called this habitual action 'seeing with my drawing eyes', which involves looking *for* forms that have the particular qualities that she is interested in using in her work. As she explains, she looks at a certain object 'with the intention of finding the form that I need, a weight, a colour, a movement'. The form that she is looking for is a quality or property of something that she wishes to capture and use later. But it is how these forms connect that is vital: 'it is always about linking something, making connections.

(Hodson 2016: 12)

Wilf further reflects on how this occurs when arguing that 'novices must become sufficiently competent participants in such genres [so] that they can identify and capitalize on fleeting opportunities to breach expectations by utilizing complex contextual and pragmatic ambiguity that results from the indeterminacy of indexical sign phenomena (Wilf 2014:402). Within this context, Wright also considers the way in which different

professions or vocations develop specific kinds of visual perception and argues that 'skilled vision is both participatory in its responsive engagement with the particularities of any field site...visual skill is as much about seeing what is there to be described as it is a matter of technical competence in achieving that description...it reveals a quality of attention in observation that may be learned (Wright 2012: 120).

The disciplined and automatic nature of Fiona's technical skill became apparent as I observed her during a jewellery making session in her workshop. The space was set up in a similar way to all other western style jewellery workshops, with the jewellery bench being the centrepiece surrounded by other various pieces of machinery and equipment mounted to tables or on shelves against the wall. The jewellery bench itself has all the 'at hand' tools and equipment that are needed to undertake the basic jewellery making tasks. This includes a wide selection of saws, files, pliers, drills and burrs, special setting and burnishing tools, and a gas soldering iron. Fiona told me that all of the tools have their place, and that the choices made around those places are a combination of what she was taught in art school and what works most practically for her in the space she has available. When she sits down at her bench with her design diagram of a brooch which will be a part of an upcoming joint exhibition with other artists, she immediately takes out the materials she needs and begins the making process. The design Fiona was working from had all the measurements and materials mapped out, so she was already familiar with the technical elements and other requirements needed to make the piece. As she didn't have a step by step process written down, I asked her how she knew what to do first (and then next) and Fiona responded that she kept the steps mostly in her head as she was going along. For very complicated pieces, however, she said that she would often write a list of steps as a general guide to keep her on track. The work that Fiona undertook in making the brooch involved a broad range of processes of varying difficulty and duration. The making of the brooch itself took approximately 5 hours and in observing the entirety of the process, it was evident that Fiona became immersed in the making and completely focused on the piece. The basic elements of the construction were mostly seamlessly carried out, with the exception of a broken saw blade, but these technical bits were interspersed from time to time with a break in the work so that Fiona could evaluate the piece as she was going along. I asked what she was doing when she stopped and looked at the brooch and her response was that she was 'getting a feel for where it was going', which she explained afterwards, meant that she wanted to ensure that the structural and the aesthetic elements were working together well. The experience of making the object was a somewhat challenging thing for Fiona to describe.

She was able to very articulately discuss the way in which the saw blade should be inserted into the frame, and how to ensure the very thin blade doesn't snap by applying just the right amount of pressure, and ensuring the angle of the blade is correct, when sawing. The subjective experience, however, was much more difficult for her to articulate:

that's a hard one! I guess it's like being in the zone. You are so focussed on the piece, but not in a really super conscious way. I know what I am saying doesn't make much sense but even though I am on auto pilot in one way, I can instantly snap out of it if my unconscious mind detects a problem with the way something looks, or if there is something that needs special attention, like when I am soldering really delicate pieces of metal together. My body just knows what to do when I am making jewellery.

(Howe-Piening 2006)

This unconscious 'knowing' that emerges over time and with practice is something that Anthropology has explored in terms of highlighting the importance of the embodied experience in creating skilled and disciplined practitioners (see Wilf 2014, Atkinson 2013, Ivinson 2012, O'Connor 2007). For example, when discussing the growing skills and knowledge of a group of carpentry apprentices, Marchand discusses the role of the senses and practice in the development of honed professional sensibilities and expertise:

Trainees commonly described working with wood as 'sensuous'...Each plank is uniquely figured and textured with great variation in hardness and density, and each responds differently to the blade of the tools requiring the carpenter to modify their actions accordingly. Auditory senses, too, clue the carpenter into the accuracy and effectiveness of her tool-wielding movements, the state of her blades and the changing directions of the wood grain. Performers and practitioners regularly speak about 'being in the zone'. In interviews, fellow carpenters explained that working intensely with tools over a period of time harmonised their thoughts and actions, and heightened their sense of coordinated control over the task at hand. Woodworking, like any physical activity, involves a 'sixth sense' commonly referred to as the somatic sensory system. This system of bodily perception is responsible for monitoring the position, location, orientation, movement and muscular tensions of one's own body and limbs. Somatic sensory data experienced by the carpenter brings awareness to such things as her stance at the workbench, grip on a tool, rotation of the hand drill, pressure on the plane, rhythm with the saw and swing of the hammer. Repeated practice helps to fine tune one's somatic perception of an activity, making possible the quick and confident recalibration of position, force and movement that characterises an 'expert' performance.

(Marchand 2008:17)

It was also clear that, although many of the aesthetic and construction choices had been pre-planned in the design stage of the brooch, Fiona's making process still incorporated regular evaluation, and sometimes the initiation of changes, in order to make sure it fits with her original creative concept.

This was couched in terms of not really 'knowing' the piece until it had an actual physical presence:

Sometimes I just sit there look at what I've made and I get this strong compulsion to make a few changes here and there. It might just be adjusting the shape a bit, or adding some overlays, textures or text. It's usually more of an intuitive thing that emerges as I sit with it because it's not always possible to really know the piece until you have it in your hands.

(Howe-Piening 2006)

This notion of the emerging and intuitive evaluation was a common theme in the art making of my informants. Barry's painting sessions were also characterised by the ebb and flow of structured activity and unstructured reflection, which he expressed as being rhythmical in nature. Barry's painting work in his studio started with the setting up of his tools and materials in the same way every day. The variation that would occur in this process was that he would anticipate the colours he would need for his current session and would mix those accordingly. Once the setup was complete, and assuming he was continuing with a painting, Barry would spend the first 10 minutes or so just looking at the painting from varying distances between a few centimetres to the other end of his studio 5 metres away. This regular ritual was a way in which Barry was able to re-establish a connection with the painting since his last session through 'having a good look at it with fresh eyes.' Barry's painting sessions were characterised by the cyclical undertaking of periods of intense concentrated activity up close to the canvas, combined with more distant, and much less active, reflection and evaluation. His tools and materials were set up in a way that facilitated this way of working, with all of his paintbrushes, paints, lacquers, pencils and the like very close at hand to the easel which was set up at one end of the long studio room. The remainder of the length of the room was kept clear so that Barry would be able to continuously and seamlessly move from his painting station to his viewing areas. He described this freedom of movement around his painting to be critical to the process of making the art because it allowed him to experience the artwork, not only as something that was the product of his creative and technical effort, but also as something that would be seen by his audience in a range of ways. This perspective, therefore, allowed Barry to more effectively control the visual elements of the painting that would influence the way in which it was received. Barry and Fiona's experiences of relating to, and reflecting on, their artworks is indicative of the kind of subjective relationship that develops during the intimate processes of art making. By the time an artist is holding the physical object in their hand (or other form of physical contact depending on the size of the artwork), the two 'subjects' have been on a journey together, which spans from the inception of an idea through to its development, design, planning, construction and refinement. The piece is the product of the artist's unique mind, emotions, social identity and labour, but is also a product of the culture through which the artist has developed their skills, practices, social

roles and aesthetic and professional sensibilities. Schacter's ethnographic research with graffiti artists in London revealed a comparable focus on ritual exemplified through the way in which they performed 'various specific gestural responses [and] distinct bodily movements [including]...physically altering the walls through spray-painting, stenciling or stickering...climbing over fences, sneaking onto private property or onto train tracks [suggesting a]...particular *ceremonial* quality'. He described the act of producing graffiti art as something that:

'was treated in a *sanctified, sacred* way by many of the artists, from the preparation beforehand to the actual act; it was mediated by highly specific and habitual methods and practices (from the cleaning of the various spray-can nozzles prior to the act to the physical encounter with the medium during it), combined with numerous materials and potent, expressive signs (such as the assorted tools used by the artist and the unique codes each of them would employ), as well as the various decorations and clothing fashioned for the specific performance (obvious examples being dark attire, hoods, gloves and battered denims) – all elements, which, I would suggest, contribute to the ritual character of the experience, and thus concomitantly, to the images' powerful efficacy and embodied nature' (Schacter 2014: 42).

4.5. CONCLUSION

The focus of this chapter was primarily to explore the practical making of an artwork, as a significant factor in the life of an artist, through providing an account of the various social and functional elements that structure and frame the practice, and of the ways in which these are understood and applied by artists. A key factor in situating the making of art within a social context was to position the practice against the framework of the social norms, obligations and privileges that artists understand and adopt, including identifying and explicating the ways in which these factors are expressed in the doing of art. This was highlighted in the way that individuals learned to do art, including through exploring the social importance and meaning that is attributed to certain critical elements in successful art making, such as in the case of creativity. The chapter also identified a number of mechanisms that were essential to the successful ongoing practice of making art, including the importance of learning the technical and social 'doing' of art through embodied and disciplined teaching and practice, developing and applying creativity as an element of high social importance and distinction, developing and maintaining a relationship between the materials, tools and artwork throughout the making process. In this capacity the pedagogical elements of art were shown to have a key role in modelling and structuring the technical practice of artists, the choices that were made in terms of methods, materials, tools and subject matter, and in inducting the novice artist into the other important parts of the artistic culture such as those associated with being an artist in the more social sense.

Learning to do art within an art school, or other skills development environment (such as a shared studio, for example) is a highly embodied experience and this powerful tool of normalising cultural behaviour is utilised in numerous ways, including through modelling the way that bodies move through studio space and in relation to the artworks. The disciplined and embodied learned practice of art making is also evident in the technical aspects of the work that are taught within the art school environment. The way in which one holds and uses tools, applies techniques and media, and physically manipulates and evaluates materials is something that becomes deeply internalised within the artist, and this is continually evident in both the observation of their practice and in the ways in which they articulate the details of their practice.

Following on from the pedagogical influence on art practice, one of the key themes that was also highlighted as an important factor, was in relation to the role that creativity played in my informants lives and practice. The notion of creativity as a phenomenon that possesses high social importance and distinction is something that can be said to be well established as a general idea across society. However, within the context of this chapter creativity was also demonstrated to be a key central attribute and idea that underpinned the practice of making art, and was something that was both seen to be inherent in the individual, but also able to be further developed through training, modelling and practice. With this foundational idea in mind, the thesis focussed on the development of concepts prior to the making of an artwork, and demonstrated the core importance of creativity as an holistic element that influenced all parts of the artist's life. This was demonstrated in the way that my informants saw themselves as living a creative life in which they utilised the unconventional thinking and relating of a 'creative person' in all aspects of their personal and professional lives. The relationship that was developed and maintained, between the artist and the materials, tools and artwork, was also highlighted as an important factor in the art making process. The way in which the artists worked with their objects was considered to be quite an intimate process, a relationship between the maker and the artwork. This relationship was underpinned by their learned and practiced discipline and skill, which rendered much of the practical work an almost natural process, and which allowed the artist to develop a more subjective connection with the piece in terms of developing its symbolic, textual and aesthetic qualities.

This chapter, when viewed within the overall context of the other chapters in this thesis, supports the assertion that the practice of making art, and all the meanings and activities

that have been discussed as inherent elements of that, are part of an holistic and integrated social practice which is characterised by its all encompassing nature, and which in turn is supported and encouraged through the unique social position that artists hold in the context of a contemporary setting such as Australia. The next chapter maintains a focus on the social and material doing of art through providing a focus on the spatial elements of the Artists' studio as a central focus in the practice of being an artist.

CHAPTER 5

ART SPACES

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The artist's studio has an iconic place in art practice and popular culture. Popular representations of the artist's studio elicit a set of generally consistent, and often romanticised, images that relate strongly to a shared, and well established, understanding of the way an artist's workspace looks and operates. These images also tie into notions of the unique social position and modes of living attributed to artists, which is often characterized by the image of a studio environment in flux, sometimes empty, and at other times, populated not only by artists, visitors, and patrons, but also by assistants and apprentices. This image has somewhat diversified over time to include a range of contemporary modes of understanding of the operation of an artist's studio, which accommodates a wider range of disciplines (such as photography, multimedia and installation), incorporates a range of new technologies, and supports a faster pace of life and work. There is, however, an enduring sense that the studio, like the artists themselves, is a phenomenon that spans numerous worlds that are both on the margin, and also very much in the centre, of the mainstream world of culture, economics and politics. Courbet's 'The Painter's Studio' (Figure 3.) demonstrates, in pictorial form, the complexity of the social forces that impact on the work undertaken in the studio. His painting depicts a very crowded studio that incorporates all the people who have an interest in his painting, which provides a fine representation of the political economy of his art world. He said of this work:

It's the whole world coming to me to be painted...on the right, all the shareholders, by that I mean friends, fellow workers, art lovers. On the left is the other world of everyday life, the masses, wretchedness, poverty, wealth, the exploited and the exploiters, people who make a living from death.

(Courbet G. 1855. Cited in Musee de Orsay 2014)



Figure 3.

Courbet, G. 1854, *The Painter's Studio: A Real Allegory of a Seven Year Phase in my Artistic (and Moral) Life*.

Courbet's example is a reminder of the diversity and complexity of the social forces that pervade the space of the artist's studio, which also reflects the complexity of the artist's role in society. This complexity of social forces is something that has continued to endure beyond the days when class divisions were a more tangible and formal fact of life. Modern narratives and depictions of the artist's studio can be found in both high and popular culture mediated forms. They have been recreated as artworks in their own right (figure 4.), as a part of ongoing memorials to a particular artist (figure 5.) or in the form of various articles, books and documentaries, focusing on a range of elements. These elements include the processes that take place in the studio (Bergstein 1995, Pigrum 2006, ABC 2013), the connection between the artist and their studio (Waterfield (ed.), 2009, Amirsadeghi (ed.), 2013, ABC 3013, Simba Productions 2014), and the educational benefit of studio practice (Pigrum 2007, Green 2010). A review of a recently released glossy coffee table book makes reference to the popular image of the artist's studio as a marginal and unique space and then goes on to highlight the layers of meaning, closely linked to the material culture contained within, that one may uncover in these interesting spaces, and which is intricately linked to the creative processes of the artist:

Artists studios have a false reputation as dens of iniquity, intrigue, mischief or alchemy, which stems from the few exotic spaces celebrated in cultural legend. Andy Warhol's 'Factory', for example, became the centre of the rebellious 1960s pop scene, and Francis Bacon's London studio, a scrapheap - or goldmine, depending on how you look at it - of disturbing and revelatory reference images and undisclosed preparatory work, has been

transplanted to a museum in Dublin... On first inspection these spaces are boringly functional. The closest thing to a glossy magazine cover is Sir Anthony Caro's scrap metal and tool shed, an artful mess of open drawers and curling wires. Floating magnificently on top of it all, as if to provide a counterweight to the power tools, there's a faded photograph of a galumphing great charging rhinoceros. Despite the apparent banality of the artist's rooms, there is great depth of detail and material lurking beneath the surface that shows the extent to which environments are fundamental to any creation.

(Waters, F. 2012)



Figure 4. Bill Walton's Recreated Studio
University of Pennsylvania 2011



Figure 5. Margaret Olley in Her Studio.
Photograph from The Age newspaper, June 2006

The ubiquitous iterations of similar representations of the studio speaks to its enduring fascination for both artists and the wider community. In this capacity it is seen as a creative space where special inspired and talented individuals bring their visions to fruition. In introducing her studio to me for the first time, Ann picks up on this notion.

Following Ann down the stairs from her main living area, we enter a small foyer that is furnished with a number of tables positioned around the sides of the room. Every table surface, the walls, and some of the floor, are covered with drawings and paintings, some having been framed, others, Annie informs me, waiting for that process to take place. Annie tells me that this space is where she brings her finished works to ‘decide whether they are good enough’ and to ‘prepare them for exhibition if they are’. We don’t stop long in this room, which, although it is central to Annie’s work process, has a somewhat liminal feel to it, as the object of this excursion is to introduce me to her studio proper, the place where ‘*it happens*’.

(Howe-Piening 2006)

This ‘*it*’, which occurs in the studio space, has been described by many of my research participants as the suite of activities and rituals that are the culmination of the conceptual creative processes of art production. The studio is seen as a place of work that functions to interpret and transcribe the unique ideas of the artist, that begin as intangible concepts in the artist’s mind, in order to ensure they are able to finally assume their tangible physical form as artworks. It is the place that was considered to be of key importance to all the visual artists I worked with – as the professional and personal space that is the site of transformation and negotiation between mind and matter, and which plays a central role in their lives as artists. The studio was often described to me as the spatial environment where concepts are brought to ‘life’ in order to have a physical presence and agency in the world, where ideas and experiments related to those concepts can be formulated and enacted, and where the artist’s identity and agency, expressed in the form of spatial, temporal and social organization and appropriation, can be enacted, assumed and explored. In this way it is a highly significant, active space in the sense, that while the conceptual, mind-based, work that has taken place substantially informs the final physical object, without that final physical object - that ‘thing’ that embodies all that the artist is trying to express - actually being produced, then according to most of the artists I worked with, it is only really ‘*telling half the story*’.

In this chapter I examine the studio as both a workplace and a significant social space, which is dedicated to the making of the physical object – the artwork. The studio is a space that can be characterized as a traditional workplace in the strict economic sense of the word, in that it is a place where one produces commodities in order to make a living (or at least has the desire to do so in the case of a number of the artists I worked with). It is, however, multifaceted in that it is also seen to display a range of other social and cultural properties, in terms of its role as a means through which concepts of self, and abstract creative concepts, can be transformed into the material through the directed application of

agency and action. This is initiated and understood within the context of a range of social normalised beliefs and practices, and is expressed through a range of active and reflective processes that are imbued with both ritual and practical elements. The studio is also a space that is characterized by a blending and transgression of the boundaries that normally, both conceptually and physically, divide the public/work and the private/domestic worlds of individuals. In this capacity, an analysis of the research data collected during my fieldwork helps to reveal the artist's understanding and conceptualisation of the art studio, which reveals its nature as a highly social and materially significant space that continuously negotiates the normally separated worlds of work and home, and is characterised as both a physical and material site, and as an idea - a conceptual place.

5.2. CONTEXTUALISING AND CONCEPTUALISING THE STUDIO

Practicing artists in Adelaide, or elsewhere in Australia, generally have the need to have access to some kind of studio space in which to produce their artworks. The kinds of spaces vary significantly, and those artists wanting to work in a discrete studio space have a number of options at their disposal. Many artists choose to establish a studio space within their own homes, which allows them the freedom to work whenever they would like without the difficulty of having to travel to their studio when they are feeling creative. This is indicative of the varied ways in which the practice of making art is carried out, with the inference being that this discipline does not necessarily have a social obligation to work in the mainstream manner that many other work related disciplines are generally required to operate. This is also the manner in which the vast majority of my informants chose to work. However, the practical limitations of setting up a home studio, or a desire to connect on a collectively creative level with other artists, will often lead to artists choosing to establish a studio away from their home base.

While I worked within both kinds of creative spaces, within my cohort of sixteen primary informants there were only two artists who had studios outside of their domestic spaces – Rick, who is a self-funded sculptor, and whose work primarily related to the production of very large steel sculptural pieces including routinely working with a range of potentially dangerous machinery and equipment. Rick's decision to rent out premises within a short distance of his home was based on the practical need to establish a more 'industrial' type of space for the kind of art he makes, and to support a more structured

approach to his work in terms of having a workplace that he attended on a daily basis at regular times. Judy is another sculptor who had been hired by a prominent religious organisation in Adelaide to create a large bronze artwork for public display outside of one of its churches in the Adelaide CBD. For Judy, hiring a dedicated space was also a matter of practicality in terms of ensuring that the particular spatial organisation of the studio would facilitate the production, and eventual safe and secure removal, of a very large (double life size) clay sculpture. Both of these artists were working on a very large scale when compared to the work being produced by the other artists I worked with, which therefore made it important for them to have an appropriate kind of space to manage the scale of their products.

For those like Rick and Judy who cannot, or choose not to, make their art within their own domestic environments, it is possible to rent premises on a private basis, or through various art organisations. Many of the prominent arts organisations in Adelaide provide studio space to those artists that fit their particular cultural or social briefs. These include a range of publically and privately funded organisations such as art schools, local government and community organisations, and those organisations that have links to state and government funded arts bodies. The briefs and requirements for each organisation can vary considerably, but usually they increase in accountability and scope in relation to the level of financial subsidy that the studio is subject to.¹⁴

¹⁴ For example, the Experimental Art Foundation of South Australia has a mission statement which includes the following passage with regard to the studio space they offer, which is "housed on two floors of purpose-built premises within the Lion Arts Centre in the arts and education precinct of Adelaide CBD, the Experimental Art Foundation operates its gallery and the specialist Dark Horsey Bookshop on the ground floor and offices and studios on the first floor. The Lion Arts Centre also houses Jam Factory Contemporary Craft & Design, Craftsouth, Media Resource Centre & Mercury Cinema, Nexus Multicultural Arts Centre, Leigh Warren & Dancers, Fowler's Live, South Australian Living Artists Festival and Patch Theatre offices. The Lion Arts Centre is owned and maintained by the South Australian government...As part of its mission to develop, foster and promote contemporary visual art and artists, the Experimental Art Foundation provides non-residential studio space for subsidised lease. Its aim is to facilitate a dynamic, supportive and secure studio environment in order to foster the development of ideas and practices, increase networking and exposure opportunities, and to increase dialogues surrounding the contemporary visual arts in Adelaide." (EAFSA 2014)

The provision of subsidised art studio spaces such as these are seen as a way in which to deliver effective positive and active social outcomes through supporting this special category of professionals in producing the kind of work that reflects, or elicits reflection or discourse, on contemporary social, political, aesthetic or technological issues or considerations. It can be seen, in essence, to be a way to deliver very targeted social outcomes that contribute positively (according to the perspective of an arts advocacy position) to society and communities as a whole. These ideals are often reflected in the articulation of the various arts visions, strategies, policies and programs that are in place across all levels of government in Australia. A typical example being the Australian Government's Visual Arts and Craft Strategy (VACS), which has funding of \$22.3 million over four years from 2011-2015, and which is currently administered by the Australia Council. Part of the funding that is delivered within the VACS and many other publically funded arts organisations, goes to supporting places for artists to work. The studio, in this capacity, is considered an essential tool of the artist, and is an integral part of the creative processes that lead to the significant stated social benefits of art.

This discussion of the artist's studio has, as a primary foundational focus, an exploration of the social and cultural construction and uses of space. In this capacity, and within an anthropological context, space has become an increasingly significant focal point that provides an important insight into the ways in which the conscious and unconscious construction and organization of spatial environments are indicative of many key social understandings. Current anthropological theories have often rejected mainstream notions of space that have perceived it as an empty, homogeneous, uncontested and abstract phenomenon. They propose an alternate view that sees space as formed by human action and constructed through 'differential densities of human experience, attachment and involvement' (Tilley 1994:10). Contemporary theories contend that the processes of the enactment of social relations within a space are complex and transactional and that space itself may be created, manipulated and reproduced through the social relations that take place within it (Jimenez 2003). I include in this the exertion of individual social agency, such as occurs during the conscious, unconscious or ritualistic spatial organization, construction or utilisation of a work space such as an artist's studio. My research suggests that the creation and use of these active spaces may involve a range of practical, social and emotional elements, including the production, reinvention, denial or appropriation of history and other socially and culturally normalized practices and understandings that are of particular significance to the agents involved. These may include such factors as political

perspectives, class and socio-economic factors, and gender and ethnicity (Featherstone and Lash (eds.) 1999, Soja (ed.) 2000, Low and Lawrence-Zuniga (eds.) 2003). With this in mind, and in relation to the construction, organization and utilization of their studio spaces, the artists I worked with assumed and expressed agency for the creation, construction and continual maintenance and redevelopment of these spaces in order for them to serve their individual identity and creative projects. My informants, however, did so within the context of a range of influences, including with reference to the unique social context and positioning they occupy, which sets them apart from other kinds of material producers, and places them within their own unique cultural and professional category. The consequent spatial elements that emerge out of such meanings and understandings of their social world reveals much about the role of the artist, both as individual social agent and as cultural phenomena, and helps to make sense of the ways in which they carry out their work and construct and express their private and public identities.

Anthropological and/or ethnographic research on the contemporary art studio is somewhat scant and is generally presented within the context of a more general study of the practice or experience of being an artist. Plattner's study on the economy of a localized art market provides an overview of the interactions at play between artists, collectors, dealers and curators. Working primarily within the context of the economics of the artist's practice, Plattner (1996:78-125) provides a range of ethnographic accounts that explicate and address the art studio in terms of the way in which they work as professional spaces, including discussing the financial arrangements associated with procuring and managing these spaces. The purpose of these discussions and descriptions of the studio appear to be as a means to support the development of an holistic understanding of the artist in a social and economic context. Housley's ethnographic research on practicing artists as social and cultural agents has a number of alignments with Plattner's in that he provides a model of the wider social contexts of art practice. The research also mirrors my own research and conclusions in that he addresses the studio as a central feature of the lived world of the artist, and 'develops the analysis of artistic agency within a field of relations by reflecting on the Sociological ontology of studios as both a site of creative production and a site of engagement between researcher and the artist as a knowledgeable cultural agent'. (Housley 2006:4). This 'field of relations' follows on from the work of Becker (1984) in terms of Housley's focus on explicating the interconnected cultural and social elements that constitute the world of the artist. Housley's research, however, applies a stronger focus on exploring the agency of the artist in negotiating these worlds, and does so within the specific social environment of

post-devolved Wales. Similarly, Sjöholm presents the studio as a highly socially active environment in which ‘collected and selected objects, research materials and experiences resonate with each other and provoke reflection and thinking...[and] material engagement and enchantment.’ (Sjöholm 2013:2) In contrast, Pigrum (2007) applies Derrida’s term ‘ontopology’ (a combination of ontology and topos) to provide a more discrete focus on exploring the way in which the art studio, as a specific spatial context, affects the lived experience and actions of the artist. All of these explorations have as a central focus the notion of the studio as place of social connection, action and agency, which supports the more general consensus within the social sciences that relates to the culturally and socially active attributes of both public and private space and place.

The relatively limited ethnographic research into the studio space may be somewhat indicative of the difficulty that is associated with gaining consistent and unfettered access to these working spaces that are often contained within the domestic arena, which in western culture, is considered to be a private and protected cultural zone (Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuniga 1999). This was clearly demonstrated to me during the course of establishing connections and recruiting informants for my research project, I was regularly confronted with the need to negotiate the way in which access to the artist’s studio space would take place. These negotiations often involved discussions regarding the times and duration of my presence in the studio, and what kind of impact I would have on that space while I was there. It was, however, concerns relating to access to the private spaces of artists that became the deciding factor for many of my potential informants to preclude themselves from my research project. Whether they chose to be a part of my project or not, a universal concern amongst all the artists I contacted was the way in which my presence would prevent them from conducting their creative work as usual, a process that was usually carried out on their own in a solitary manner. There was in some cases a strong concern that a violation of an intimate and private space might occur, and that ‘odd’, or idiosyncratic, practices and rituals, or disorganization of space and process, might be revealed.

Notwithstanding the difficulty of accessing these types of spaces for research purposes, the domestic environment continues to grow as a site of discrete anthropological interest, particularly in relation to domestic and gendered culture, technology, and the spatial and material aspects of homes in comparison to wider social ideas regarding identity, class and social status (see Booth 1999, Douglas 1991, Laermans and Muelders 1999, Lull 1980,

1988, Silverstone and Hirsch 1992, Selberg 1993, Tacchi 1998, Wright 1991). The type of home most commonly found in western and industrialised societies is often constituted differently to the more public homes of many 'traditional' non-industrial societies, but an interest in gaining access to western homes as a site for the study of material culture has increased in recent years alongside a general increase in the number of anthropologists moving away from studying the cultures of traditional societies in favour of studying their own home or other contemporary industrialised societies (Miller 2001:3, Marcoux 2001, Woodward 2001). The domestic setting of the home in industrial cultures has obvious interest as a location for the study of material culture, but also presents opportunities to explore a range of other fields of contemporary social life, including women and their domestic life (see Booth 1999, Laermans and Muelders 1999), the home as a heavily mediated environment (see Gumpert and Drucker 2002) and examinations into the spatial characteristics of homes and how these characteristics reflect wider social organisation and norms (see Wright 1991, Douglas 1991). All of these areas of study, as a natural consequence, must also address the material artefacts of such social relations. For example a study of mass media in the home would look at the hardware that enables the media to be present in the home. It might be interested in how the computer, television and radio are situated within the space of the home and how they are presented, maintained, spoken about and activated (Lull 1980,1988, Silverstone and Hirsch 1992, Selberg 1993, Tachi 1998). All of these physical aspects of a mediated home reveal the significance of these objects within this setting and thereby give clues as to how the mediated messages that come into the home might be consumed. Through studies of this kind, one can begin to understand the importance of the home and its constituent qualities to the social relations of the inhabitants, both in and outside of their domestic environments. Research of this kind also provides a useful comparative perspective when exploring the use of, and meanings attached to, the artist's studio, particularly given the general similarities of the sites in terms of the complexities that exist in the relationship between the private and public elements of both domestic, and artistic, spaces. With consideration to these aforementioned conceptual understandings of artist's work spaces, the next two sections work together to form a picture of the interconnected way in which meaning is applied, and space utilized, within the artist's studio. The aim is to illustrate, through the presentation and analysis of ethnographic examples, the multilayered conceptual, functional and material aspects of the artist's studio, and how these specific elements work in an integrated way to produce a conceptually active, socially complex and highly engaged space.

5.3. STUDIO AS WORKSPACE

This section addresses the studio as a workspace in terms of how the notion of the studio as a place of work (in the economic and productive sense), is conceptualized, created and experienced by artists. The conceptual and practical character and style of the studio, as a workplace, can be compared against the various workplace models that exist within a given society. Within this context, I argue that the studio is conceptualized, and acts, as a special kind of work place that transcends the boundaries that are normally established for work environments, even those that are situated within the physical confines of the domestic arena. The difference, I contend, primarily exists in the all encompassing nature of the practice of art and the state of 'being an artist', which compels the continual contestation and transgression of boundaries on both a physical and a conceptual level.

The artist's studio is a multifaceted environment that can be explored in terms of the evident dichotomies between the public/private, and the domestic/professional realms in which it exists. Pragmatically speaking, the studio can be said to be, first and foremost, a place of work - a professional space that facilitates the earning of a living, and supports the construction of an essential public profile for the artist. It is a place in which the desire to be a fully self sufficient practicing and successful working artist is either realized or strived for. The studio is also often a private and domestic space – a space in which the artist spends a lot of time alone, and where the innermost thoughts and creative ideations of the artist are revealed, explored, manipulated and expressed through the processes of making art. These multiple modes of function and operation are understood to be a normal part of an artist's working life (both from within the artistic fraternity and from across society at large), and in this capacity, the difficulties and dichotomies associated in working in such spaces are acknowledged and embraced as a natural part of the 'special' but often contested, social position which artists are deemed to hold.

The practice of working from home, in a space that has been constructed specifically for a work purpose is something that is increasingly becoming a feature of the contemporary world of work. This is particularly true for white collar or professional workers whose incomes are mainly derived through the use of computer based administrative tools, the products of which can be easily produced on the spot, or transferred across the modern technological forms of communication such as the Internet. (Nätti, J. et al. 2011) Telecommuting, which is part of a wider trend towards 'flexible work practices' in many industries and professional contexts, has seen a strong growth in recent years, with

approximately 17% of people working from home on a regular basis during the course of their work tenure (Dockery and Bawa 2014, see also Nätti, et al 2011 for the European perspective). Working from home has, however, always been a traditional feature of some types of work such as farming, certain trades and for people in the creative industries such as artists.

Specific challenges and complexities associated with working from home on a regular basis include the need to differentiate oneself professionally from the domestic individual by creating a workspace and a work structure that places boundaries around the conflicting identities. Dockery and Bawa cite Gajendran et al's (2007) research on telecommuting, which assert that it 'increases the permeability of boundaries (degree to which either family or work encroaches on the other because they occupy the same place and, potentially, the same time) in life domains, making it easier for one domain to intrude on the other, potentially leading to a 'work versus family' conflict. Such permeability can also make psychological disengagement from work more difficult, increasing the likelihood of time-based conflict leading employees to work after normal work hours and this may be especially true for individuals who find it difficult to separate activities between home and work.' (2014: 4) Amongst my informants this was a common complexity that was encountered, which highlighted the need for them to find ways maintain a sense of differentiation between those professional and domestic elements of their homes. There was also, however, a sense amongst my informants that this complexity was a feature of many of the arenas of the artist's experience, given that the consensus was that being an artist is more than just a professional pursuit. The role of the artist, therefore, did tend to have an impact on the way in which my informants understood the function of developing and maintaining a home studio.

The domestic elements of a home, those certain social attributes that are in contrast to the attributes of public spaces, include such things as spaces that focus on the fostering of intimate and kin relationships, and personal identities and agendas, rather than spaces that are designed to facilitate the more public aspects of an individual's social life, such as the earning of an income, the performance of vocational skill and the maintenance of professional networks. The home, however, can still be said to be a combination of both the wider social, and more intimate private, worlds of individuals, particularly in relation to its compliance with culturally normalised patterns of spatial organisation and utilisation, and the performance of various social hierarchies and patterns of behaviour and consumption.

While the home can be seen to be a space that reflects the surrounding society and culture within which it exists, the nature of our cultural understanding of work as being that which sits most comfortably outside of the domestic domain, creates a kind of natural tension within the home based work space that requires the application of creative appropriation and renegotiation of the set notion of that cultural space in order to make it work. In this capacity, the individual who works from home commits effort and resources to creating a place that is bounded and separated off from the rest of the places in the home, and in this way, the initial creation of a professional space starts to take shape. The kind of work that generally takes place in this capacity includes separating and organising a physical part of the house into a facsimile of a typical workplace (the home office or home studio). Depending on the resources available for this process, this may include transforming a whole separate room, or may be as simple as setting up a desk or workbench within an existing domestic space. The artists I worked with displayed considerable variation in the level of separation they instituted between their work and domestic spaces. This was largely contingent upon their access to resources as all my informants expressed a desire to work in an ‘ideal studio’, which was usually characterised as a separate, large, well lit, private and well furnished (with relevant quality equipment) space. Some, like Barry, had achieved an almost ideal situation. His studio space (Figure 6.) was specifically incorporated into the design of his new build home in the outer southern suburbs of Adelaide. The home itself was a relatively mainstream stock home of that kind that is offered by many home builders across the country, but when choosing between the particular designs on offer, Barry and wife Christina, who is also an artist, chose one that would provide enough room for both to have their own separate art studios.

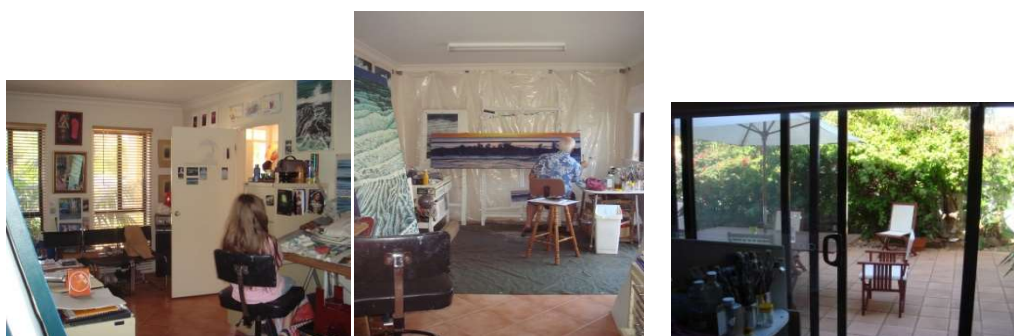


Figure 6. Barry's studio

Photo displays the size and light quality in the room, which were considered to be of considerable importance to Barry's work (Ethnographic note 2007)

The conduct of any particular kind of work usually requires the utilisation of specific equipment, and potentially an environment that has taken into account the safety and other work related

needs of the artist. The act of setting up a discrete workplace also has a role in helping the artist to initiate a particular frame of mind that supports a successful studio work session, something which was described to me by an informant as 'setting up a creative and productive headspace'. In this capacity, I argue that when the worker physically enters their studio workspace they conceptually and physically assume a modified persona as 'professional artist', and shed their private persona for the given period of time they are at work in the studio. Barry, who had been retired for a number of years from his position as a painting lecturer at a tertiary institution in the city, referred to going to his time in the studio as 'going to work'. His career as an artist had been well established since the 1970's and although he had retired from his teaching position, he considered that 'one never retires from being an artist'. In his mind, therefore, the construction of his studio as a separate workspace, combined with the rather strict work hours that he maintained, provided a strong basis for maintaining a sense of his professional self within the confines of his domestic space.

The practical factors involved in setting up a studio are an essential component of creating a successful home work space. All but one of the artists I worked with had established their studios at their homes, with most working around spaces not specifically designed for the medium of the art being made. This required the negotiation of a number of challenges, and the application of some creativity in terms of achieving the technical requirements necessary to carry out the work being undertaken. Fiona, who is a jeweller, explains some of these practical elements that she considered during the setting up of her studio space, which is located in a spare room in her suburban Adelaide home:

The room isn't ideal in terms of its size and location, but I have tried to utilise the space in the best way I can to facilitate making the work happen. When I first set it up I was mostly concerned with lighting and safety...after that, I wanted to make it my own..to make it a comfortable place to be...part of me. Safety and practicality were the first big things though. I need to have good lighting in the room as I work a lot in there at night (after I come home from my day job) and it can be difficult to see what is going on with very small jewellery bits and pieces if the light isn't good. For me, initially setting up the workshop was a matter of figuring out what I needed to have in the studio in order to get the job done, and then determining the best way to organise all that stuff so that when I moved around, I would be as efficient and fluid as possible....Safety is a huge issue in a jewellery studio space, because there are a lot of chemicals, fire and machinery that are used on a regular basis. This means you have to take a lot of extra care to ensure that the space is organised in such a way as to minimise the chance of accidents, while still being a practical and enjoyable place to work. In practical terms this meant making a plan on paper first to ensure that fireproof areas were constructed and placed appropriately, and that chemicals and potentially dangerous machinery and tools were positioned to minimise harm....I also have a habit of collecting 'stuff' of all manner, so having a lot of storage space in the studio is really important to make

sure that I have places to put things and don't end up tripping over them and breaking my neck.

(Howe-Piening 2007)

Fiona's functional considerations in relation to her studio reflect a focus on her studio space as a facilitative working environment, which she utilises to support the safe and practical creation of her art objects. While safety and functionality were cited as being of primary importance for Fiona's studio, her secondary consideration was a focus on the aesthetic and design aspects of the space which she characterised as 'not ideal' in terms of what she had conceptualised as the 'perfect' studio.

Annie, who works in a diverse range of mediums, also expressed a number of practical concerns in the way she has constructed her studio space. As she showed me around her studio space, she led me through an open archway at one end of a foyer and we entered a very large and open, yet still quite seemingly disorganised, space with high ceilings and a number of partitioned areas. These partitioned off studio areas were all located along the right hand half of the room as one entered the space from the foyer. The entire left hand side of the room was taken up by Annie's studio, which while messy, was organised into a number of fairly distinct areas dedicated to clearly specific tasks. Annie pointed out that the diversity of these distinct areas reflects the diversity of her art practice, which ranges from painting and drawing to sculpture to installation art. She described her studio:

This space had originally been a mechanical workshop, and it was so large [approximately 20m x 20m] that I decided to create a few more studio spaces, which I rent out to 3 other artists as their studio spaces....all except one has been renting the spaces for years now so they feel like part of the family in a way. They all have their own keys and can come and go as they please. Their coming and going doesn't disturb me as they enter through a side doorway on the studio level [she showed me the separate entrance, which is quite a distance from the entry for the domestic part of Annie's place]...I had a couple of reasons for renting out the studio space – As an ex art teacher, I really wanted to try and support other emerging artists to have a great space to make their art - but it's also a great way to make some extra cash now that I am retired and on a pension'. For my own studio, Its been a process of 30 years of arranging and rearranging the space to fit in with my lifestyle at the time. When the kids were young, I was a bit more careful about safety than I am now, and I made space for them to work on art projects of their own. Now I am living on my own, I have a pretty messy studio and often tend to start and leave half finished projects all over the studio space. Practically, it's not an issue for me because I don't usually have a really strict timeframe that I am working to, and my space is so large that it can afford to get a bit disorganised.

(Howe-Piening 2006)

In comparison, another artist, Ron, who is a full time and well funded painter, discussed a range of somewhat different practical considerations that he focused on when setting up his studio:

I build this studio about 4 years ago when things started to go well for me in a professional sense. We have a pretty small house and my wife was about to have our 3rd baby, so we really needed all the domestic space we could get our hands on. I decided to build something in the garden and, once I had worked out how much space I needed and how much I was willing to spend, I ordered a prefabricated wooden studio in kit form. My father-in-law and I built it ourselves over a week or so...I like to keep things pretty simple and uncluttered (you might notice this in my painting as well), and so it was important to me to be really minimal in terms of what I brought into the space. As you can see, I have the bare minimum...(this included his paints and tools, sketchbooks and pencils, a small easel and a large wall mounted easel [which is approximately 3 metres wide by 2 metres high], a few art books, a sink and small cupboard, a kettle and a coffee mug, a stereo, a heater, and a couple of photos and pictures from his kids)...not having much stuff around really helps me to concentrate on the work at hand.

(Howe-Piening 2007)

An initial inspection of the workspaces of my artist informants may lead to the impression that they have successfully managed the separation of their professional and domestic personas and spaces. All discussed their art studios and the construction and maintenance of these spaces with a clarity that confirmed their delineation in terms of what is supposed to transpire within the confines of the space. The reality, however, is somewhat more complex and it became evident that, while the studio has a physical and conceptual pre-eminence as the place in which art making occurs, the boundaries between the studio and the other areas of the artists homes was much more blurred and nuanced.

The ways in which the blurring of the lines between domesticity and professionalism occurred in the work spaces of my informants were, primarily, in relation to where artistic work actually took place, and the way in which the world of domesticity permeated into the professional space. As Dockery and Bawa (2014:4) point out, there appears to be a risk of professional and domestic boundaries being degraded wherever people choose, or are compelled, to work from home. The degree to which this happened with my informants varied considerably, but in all cases there was some degree of boundary shifting or permeation. The most professionally focused of the artists I worked with devoted significant effort in developing and maintaining firm boundaries between their work and private worlds. This included such things as ensuring that the space was able to be cut off both visually and aurally, and setting relatively strict working times that were adhered to on a regular basis. Regardless of the strong adherence to these physical and temporal

structures, the world of the domestic would often present itself in the studio during scheduled work hours. This most often occurred to facilitate the needs of the family or other intimates, or to manage particular domestic issues that may have arisen. In the case of the most least structured work spaces of my informants, the domestic sphere and the work spaces could be said to have almost no delineation. Frizz's workspace was an example of this in that her tiny one bedroom unit also served as her painting studio. The 'studio' was integrated into the lounge room which was approximately 16 metres square and housed the lounge suite, coffee table, a small dining table, a table for paints and other materials and an easel. Frizz's finished paintings were hung on the walls, leaned against furniture and walls, or were placed outside on the balcony. The adjoining kitchen (again, very tiny) would serve both to cook meals and to clean and prepare painting materials and tools. Despite this significant blending of the domestic and creative spaces Frizz maintained a sense of her workspace through the routine setting up of the 'mise en place' (the putting in place of all the elements) before every painting session. This allowed her, through activities involved in the set up ritual, to imbue the small space surrounding her easel with the right conceptual feel to facilitate the conduct of a successful painting session.

The professionalism of the artist's studio as workplace may also be said to be contested, as previously touched upon, in terms of the structure of the work times and activities, and the way in which certain mainstream work practice standards, such as those relating to health and safety, are understood and applied. Whilst most of my informants expressed a desire to structure themselves in a manner that would encourage the practice of regular artwork sessions, it is true to say that some were more successful at this than were others. In explaining why regular work sessions were seen as a sign of professionalism, a number of informants described how they equated regularity with commitment, productivity and legitimacy. For example, Fiona said that when she made a strong effort to prioritise regular work hours in her studio over the other compelling parts of her life she always felt rewarded by a sense of achievement and legitimacy. This sense of achievement was characterised in terms of her feelings of being a 'proper professional artist rather than just doing art when I can fit it in.'. She further elaborated on the benefits of regular studio sessions by highlighting the value of regularity for 'getting lots of stuff done...it's amazing how much you can do if you just force yourself to spend a few hours a day focussing on the work'.

The scope of the differences in relation to the work practices of my informants was quite wide ranging, and included two artists who kept to extremely structured schedules, such as one would expect from a regular job, clocking in at a given time and leaving ‘the office’ at the same time every day. This more structured approach seems to be one that is generally accepted as being an appropriate model for all types of home based work, in that the work hours generally comply with those practiced in the outside world. This can be seen to lend a clear sense of legitimacy to the work practices undertaken within the domestic environment, and this was certainly true for some of the individuals I worked with. Keeping regular work hours also had practical implications for individuals who had working partners and children still at school, because it allowed them to work at the times when these significant others were out of the house for the day, thereby creating a quiet window to reflect, and also ensuring that they can spend quality time together with their families later on. Research on home based work shows that, whilst the active working within office hours is generally considered to be the best model, people working within these flexible frameworks often continue to work after hours, or during times that would normally be considered to be family time. Research on the impact of telecommuting supports the notion that these arrangements ‘can increase conflict between work and family when employees who work at home spend a greater, or disproportionate, percentage of their time on paid work activities’ (Dockery and Bawa 2014:4). This appeared not to be a major issue for my informants who were fortunate enough not to need other sources of income and were, therefore, able to work effectively on a regular basis during hours that suited their domestic and professional needs. For those artists who derived the majority of their incomes from other places, however, the need to balance paid work, art making and their domestic and social life proved to be more of a balancing act. This complexity, coupled with the more expressive and flexible working style of most of the artists I worked with, tended to support the development of a more integrated, ad-hoc or impulsive approach to studio work. Often the impetus to enter the studio was predicated on some internal or external form of compulsion such as the sudden emergence of specific ideas or concepts that needed immediate action, or the need to get a piece finished for a deadline, such as an impending exhibition. Ann, who is also a retired art lecturer, explained how she manages her time in the studio:

I end up in my studio almost every day, mostly just playing around with ideas unless I have an exhibition coming up or something. I don’t ever have a set time for starting or stopping, except for when *Bold and the Beautiful* (BB) comes on at 5...I always stop for that....sometimes I bring something small with me to work on while I watch it in my bedroom. If I am trying to finish work for an exhibition I will sometimes be in my studio

for 12 hours straight, just coming out for food and BB. I don't always just work in my studio though...there are lots of areas in my house that, over the years, have become extensions of my studio...like the downstairs kitchenette which I only ever use for mixing materials and doing clean ups, never for food prep...Basically, I just go with what works for me at the time, which is sometimes not much and sometimes quite a lot.

(Howe-Piening 2006)

This more flexible style of studio work, which constituted the style adopted by the majority of my informants, was also mirrored in the flexible consideration given to other normally essential elements of a workplace, such as health and safety and risk management.

Health and safety and risk management are considered to be a core part of any well functioning workplace, and are regulated by legislated industrial Work Health and Safety (WHS) standards and policies (see SafeWork Australia 2011). It was clear that, while there was a general desire to maintain the safety of themselves and their visitors within their studios, there was also quite a diverse range of engagement with these standards, which reflected the more personal and flexible nature of the studio space and the artist's themselves. The majority of my informants, with the exception of one individual, were only somewhat aware of the WHS Model Act 2011 and its regulations and standards. The way in which work safety within the studios was generally understood was that, as the artists I worked with were intimately knowledgeable about their studio spaces, they were innately able to work safely in concert with their studios in a manner that implicitly identified and weighed up risks and hazards. For example, when responding to my question about the health impact of the fumes being generated by the oil paints and turpentine being used in his studio, Barry stated that he was used to the smell as he had been using those same products for 40 years. Barry said that he wasn't aware of any particular health problems that could be caused by the chemicals, and hadn't taken any steps to find any relevant information, but he considered that the risk was probably relatively low. While there are specific guidelines for the safe use of the kinds of equipment and chemicals that are frequently used in the artist's studio (as provided by manufacturers), the legislation covering workplace safety does not actually apply to sole practicing artists in their home studios. The National Association for Visual Arts (NAVA) provides this guideline for sole artists:

Where the practitioner works as an individual in his/her own studio, the occupational health and safety legislation places no obligations in relation to the practitioner's health and safety on those for whom they are doing the work, because they do not work 'for' anybody. The legislation places no obligations on those with whom they work, because they do not work

with anybody. However, the obligations of manufacturers of plant and substances for use at work will apply where practitioners use them in their work. The manufacturers' obligations relate simply to 'use at work', whether that work is done within a work relationship or not. The position of the self-employed (which includes the individual practitioner) under occupational health and safety legislation creates a form of statutory occupier's liability. Occupation of a workplace results in statutory obligations of care to anyone who enters the workplace

(NAVA 2001: 9.9)

The varied approaches to standard work practices may be influenced by the lack of authoritative oversight that would be considered to be a normal part of practices within a discrete professional or vocational workplace. The lack of structure and order that is evident in the spaces of the artist's studio, however, can also be seen to have a connection with the overall unconventional lives that artists routinely lead, the available time and financial resources available to the artist, and the impact of the blurring of lines between domestic and professional spaces, which may support the idea that the studio is as benign a space as the other more intimate parts of the artist's domicile.

While it is clear that the artists I worked with had both a desire and a need to construct a discrete workspace in which to make their art, it can also be seen that the way in which this occurred is significantly more blended and flexible than that which would be evident in mainstream spaces that are dedicated to work only and do not have a domestic component associated with them. The way in which the artists constructed, utilised and conceptualised their studios as workspaces has some similarity with other home based workers, in that there was work committed to the separation out of the domestic and work spaces and there was always a level of domestic incursion into the workspace, which was managed through a continual renegotiation and re-establishment of the boundaries. The studio spaces of artists, however, demonstrated even more blending and less structure than other home based workers, and this was further demonstrated through the examination and articulation of the studio as a space of individual agency for the artist, of which a discussion follows.

5.4. STUDIO AS PERSONAL SPACE

This section discusses the studio as an actively constructed individual space, where decisions that are made about the space and its contents reflect the identity and agency of the artist, who sees himself as both unique individual and as a practitioner who exists within a wider historical and social context, and as an operator within a significant social category. The work that is done by the artist in this capacity also supports the construction

of the studio as a transformational space, where ideas become concrete and where reflection is combined with physical movement and action, both in the utilization of technologies, tools and space, in order to do the ‘work’ of continuously creating and revising the subject objects that are known as artworks. This conscious organisation and utilisation of space is a powerful means of constructing places and inscribing spaces with meaning. It is within this context that I focus on the way that the artists I worked with displayed an assertion of their agency to make their studios into highly revealing social spaces that reflected the tension between the marginal and mainstream dichotomous worlds that artists routinely live within. In discussing their work spaces my artist informants demonstrated a strong personal attachment to their studios that was very often couched in terms of its capacity to act as a space of individual expression, which related to their personal and political selves but also made reference to, and often expressed a kind of reverence for, historical or pedagogical modes of spatial organization for artistic spaces. Ann’s own experience of her studio exemplified the breadth of personal connection with the space, and with the many aspects of herself that she was able to express through that space. Ann’s discusses these aspects when reflecting on the organization of her own studio space:

I guess I am drawn to the classic art studio look – you know – a kind of warm and interesting room with shelves and benches full of weird natural and manmade objects, photos, sketches and drawings on the walls and on tables....it’s what I have always known an artist’s studio should be like, it’s what I experienced when I went to art school and it’s what I modeled to my students when I taught at art school...it just feels right, you know?...its a really stimulating environment to work in, but I also feel like I am following on in a long kind of aesthetic tradition...much like when I reference traditional styles or aesthetics in my painting or drawing..i am connecting back to something that, for me, is part of being an artist...you know – recognizing that we have a long history.

(Howe-Piening 2006)

Within some contexts this dichotomous active construction could be characterized as the construction of ‘contested space’. Low and Lawrence-Zuniga define contested space as: ‘locations where conflicts, in the form of opposition, confrontation, subversion, and/or resistance, engage actors whose social positions are defined by differential control of resources and access to power’ (2003:18). In this capacity, art, as an historical socio/political cultural form, is a medium which invites contestation. This is often expressed in mainstream views, portrayed in the media for example, about the public’s belief that artists have agenda’s that are not in line with what the majority of the public may

be comfortable with. Works such as Azlan McLennan's *UnAustralian* (Figure 7.), support such notions and have the potential to create tensions, contestation and conflict.¹⁵



Figure 7. *UnAustralian*.

Azlan McLennan, 2006.

The ways in which the studios of my informants were set out, both in terms of the general spatial organization and the material culture of the studio, displayed a strong sense of personal engagement with their own identities and their extended social agendas. This engagement was often very noticeably in the way that 'things' were used and thought about with regard to their placement and utilization within the studio. The importance of these items of material culture, which were always a featured part of the artist's spaces, was evident throughout the course of my field research. Within this context I explore how those elements were chosen and used in both practical and conceptual ways, and I uncovered narratives or biographies that were significant to their presence in the studio and to the construction and maintenance of the space as an 'identity maker' of the artist. All the artists that I worked with, to varying degrees, had a range of both practical and more seemingly arbitrary material objects in their studio spaces. During my time with my informants there seemed to be a strong inclination amongst them to relate to the material aspects of their work spaces in a way which demonstrated a significant personal investment. It appears that

¹⁵ In this partially performative work McLennan set fire to an Australian flag as a form of protest against the Government as described in the following passage:

The flag burning symbolises the locally and internationally deplored treatment by the Australian government of its indigenous peoples, asylum seekers, its industrial relations and education reforms, US collaboration in the attacks in Iraq and Afghanistan and the incitement against Muslim and Arab populations at home and abroad. This act is compounded by Howard's denial that there is no underlying racist sentiment in Australia following the racial tensions in Sydney in December and more importantly, the government's clear role in this division of class.

(McLennan 2006)

The remains of the burnt flag was later displayed as an artwork in a Melbourne gallery. McLennan's artwork caused significant controversy in Australia with some people calling for a change to the law to make flag burning illegal (Ewart 2006), whilst other groups began producing and selling their own flag burning kits to support the causes that McLennan had highlighted.

this personal investment in the material constitution of the studio space, whilst revealing much about the practical aspects of the art making itself, can also reveal much about the social character of the space and the way in which it is materially constructed and utilized in order to develop and maintain social identities, and to facilitate and represent social relations across a range of levels. The things that artists have in their studios have been placed there by them. In this context, I apply a range of ethnographic examples to argue that the items artists choose to have in their studio provides them with a forum upon which to attach materiality to otherwise abstract notions of belief, belonging and identity.

Material culture within the studio includes practical items that are related to the work being undertaken by the artist, in one or more particular mediums, such as tools of the trade, which incorporates a wide diversity of artifacts like easels, hand tools and machinery, consumables of many kinds such as paints and other drawing medium, chemicals and polishing pastes, reference and research materials, and safety equipment. These practical items are the focus of the next chapter in which I discuss the techniques, tools and processes of the artists work as a key feature of their everyday practice. This section predominantly focuses on the objects that find their way into the artist's work spaces, but which have little practical value in terms of the production of artworks. In some cases, this will include practical items that have achieved a special status and have, therefore, been placed in the studio for reasons that exceed their practical capability.

The notion of value is one that is worth mentioning at this point, as it became clear during the course of my field research in the studio that value was attributed to things within the studio in a number of different ways. Economists will often refer to an object's 'use value' as an alternative to discussion of its economic value (Marx 1976: 1). Use value, in an economic sense, usually refers to the utilitarian value of an artefact (Dant 1999: 44-46, 50-53). The objects I focus on in this section, while possibly possessing some kind of utilitarian value, all have a more important primary use value which relates to the meaning that people have attached to them as personal items of significance. These meanings, when revealed and explicated, provide a means through which to understand the ways in which my informants worked to maintain a public and private sense of themselves, particularly in their persona as artist. In this capacity it became clear that the material culture of the studio works as a means to symbolise the personal identities of artists, including in relation to their political and social ideologies, ethnicities, gender and sexuality, amongst others. It is within this context that, through the personal material culture of the studio, the artist constructs a

space that is more than a place of work. It is a site of expression for the representation and display of specifically chosen artefacts that provide a 'symbolic narrative' of who the artist is. I argue that the placement of personal objects within the studio can, therefore, be seen to be much more than just acts of decorating or artistic display, but can be seen to more deeply reflect a sense of desire to reveal the artist's personally constructed hierarchy of values through the appropriation of domestic spaces. This has been described as 'a process as opposed to an act of individual expressivity, in which past and future trajectories (inseparable from external abstractions such as class) are negotiated through fantasy and action, projection and interiorisation'. (Clarke 2002: 25) ¹⁶

The artists I worked with also used objects in their studios to represent their inner personal selves and their hierarchies of value. The range of objects was large and varied and included mementos of all kinds, political posters, prints or photos of other artist's work, pictures of family members or friends, printed sayings, pot plants, esoteric items, candles and incense. These objects came up in discussions from time to time, and were talked about in terms of their history and their impact on the workspace and the worker in that space. For example, Ann's explicitly expressed and articulated identity as a Feminist was clearly given symbolic prominence of place in her studio. One of the first thing that can be seen is a print of her work 'Women Hold up Half the Sky' (Figure 8.) She relates to this 1978 work as emblematic of her feminist credentials, and although most of her more contemporary works do not have a feminist theme, she points out a number of other personal things in her studio, such as posters, dolls bought for her sons, fertility fetishes and locks of her hair, that she sees as being symbolic of her continuing support for the feminist movement.

¹⁶ An example that Clarke (2002) uses is of Kelly who has appropriated her living room as an expression of her desires to become socially upwardly mobile. In this room she has adopted formal principles of design through the use of a monochrome colour scheme and maintains this look on a budget through the use of home cleaning products and hand-made soft furnishings. Kelly expresses a desire to become attached to a man of reasonably good economic means and to become self-employed in her own fashion business. She also regularly maintains herself and her body through a fitness regime as she feels this will help her find a suitable mate. Through the work that she puts into her living room and her body, both of which she sees as being public expressions of her private self, Kelly reveals that she has taken on certain aspects of social ideals, such as a desire to elevate her position socially and financially, to become part of a traditional heterosexual partnership/family unit and to maintain an ideal feminine physical form. She has created a hierarchy of ideals that she then expresses through the way that she decorates herself and her living room (pp: 33-36).



Figure 8. Women Hold Up Half the Sky
Ann Newmarch 1978.

These special personal objects that Ann keeps in her studio can be seen to be representations of a range of dynamics between her public and the private self, and relate not only to her political identity, but also further her construction of herself through her display of items that represent her taste, age and social class. According to Woodward (2001), significant artifacts such as those displayed by Ann are usually the focal points of discussion, consideration and maintenance, and through the processes of narration and the articulation of biographies, these objects come to be known as symbols for a range of self-forming experiences and notions that are, in some way, unique to the owner.

The personalization of the studio, whilst being a way in which the individual can reveal more of their private self within the workspace, is also still a public act in that the studio is a place where a range of people visit and in which the visual spectacle of the space is taken note of. This was especially evident during SALA's Open Studio event, in which a couple of the artists I worked with participated in inviting the public into their spaces. For example, Ann's preparations in anticipation of this event were revealing in terms of how she worked to finesse the spatial organization and material constituents of her studio to more effectively act as a representation of the self she wished to portray to the wider

community. In this capacity Ann devoted a couple of days preparing for the event to ‘spring clean’ and organize the studio. This included choosing which items to pack away in boxes and which would be carefully left out on work benches, easels and tables. When questioned about the criteria for what goes and what stays, Ann was not entirely sure about how to respond at first, but after some thought identified the need to hide objects that were not aesthetically pleasing (like broken tools and materials, half finished but rejected drawings etc), and to leave out the ones that Ann herself liked the look of in some way. At the end of the spring clean the studio looked significantly tidier and, as Ann put it ‘more professional’. Her feminist artifacts remained in place, and she had added a few more personal items such as photos of her family and dogs. She had also spent some time unpacking and sorting through stored artworks, of which she chose a few of the ones she liked the best to display. The need to perform her ideal self during the open studio was also demonstrated through the hospitality Ann extended to all visitors. She dressed up, provided refreshments, and greeted people warmly as they entered the studio. This was an important part of her role as host for the event, but it was the hours she devoted earlier to ‘setting the scene’ in her studio, those hours that her visitors were not aware of, that provided Ann with the power to demonstrate much more of herself than a brief meeting would reveal. The way in which Ann prepares herself for her public role aligns with Goffman's concept of the backstage and front stage in which social actors assume and act out specific social roles which incorporates the preparation and maintenance of the appropriate settings for which to perform those roles (Goffman 1959).

As a means of facilitating the sense of creative self and personal space in the studio, my informants often supported the use of material culture with a range of other more ephemeral ‘artifacts’. This included the use of media and sound to create an atmosphere for themselves within the studio by playing certain kinds of music, or listening to particular radio or television shows while they worked. Within this context sound plays an important part in the creation of a ‘tactile’ and perceptible environment of sorts that contributes to the sense of a social self for artists. In this capacity, sound became so much more than an ambient element in a studio space and it assumed the multiple functions of constructing a sense of sociality in an environment that was often devoid of those elements on a daily basis, maintaining a sense of self through asserting a music or subject matter preference, and creating a work zone that could be described as a sphere of focus and rhythm in which artists can feel they are operating effectively. Tacchi’s work on radio consumption and integration into the domestic environment highlights radio’s use as a means through which

people can, conceptually speaking, extend beyond the immediate context and physical confines of the home. Within this context, radio and other forms of sound media, can be seen to be a mediating factor between individuals in the home and the wider world (Tacchi 1998). Tacchi also raises the notion of the construction of a 'soundscape' when discussing way in which radio sound is used and understood in the home, and in this capacity asserts that people use radio sound within the scope of an everyday routine to develop personal work and organisational effectiveness through the establishment of rhythm facilitated by sound (Tacchi 2009). The application and utilization of sound in this way was apparent during my time working with my informants in their studios in that they routinely used forms of sound, such as radio dialogue or music, as a tangible and inherent element of the spatial organization of their studio spaces. An example of this was provided by Rick who shared his morning radio ritual with me:

I always start my morning with programs broadcast from the US. This one I am listening to at the moment is a guy who talks about pretty ordinary American stories that are a bit sentimental and funny. It's a way I can connect myself back to home while I am here working by myself'. Rick makes us both coffee in the small kitchen attached to his studio workshop and then he turns up the radio and sits down at one of 3 large industrial looking steel benches. This one, unlike the others, is set up with papers, books, sketch pads and the like, and I watch him while he picks up some sketches he has made for a sculpture in preparation for making some more formal, to scale, plans. The guy on the radio has a soft grandfatherly voice that is rather comforting and a tad soporific. He is recounting a story of a childhood memory set in middle America and Rick is settling in to the rhythm of working whilst he listens to the program. The mornings generally always started this way during my field research period with Rick. Rick considered that the coffee, radio and paperwork were a ritual that set the mood for the day and created a kind of zone he needed to organize the more physical or technical activities he would undertake. As the day progressed, and he became more active, Rick would usually listen to a variety of music on CD, with his favourite being the atmospheric music of Phil Glass. There were many times when the workshop was too loud to hear any kind of music, but the CD generally stayed on despite this, which when worked ceased for whatever reason, created a way to fill the silent moments.

(Howe-Piening 2007)

The 'zone' that can be consciously created through the playing of music, or through the practice of other kinds of rituals within the studio, was also cited as a means through which the transformational processes of turning concept to object could be facilitated. The notion of the studio space as being a space where transformation and creation occurs is one that is central to the artist's conceptualisation of the purpose of the space, and the studio was often talked about as being a place which embodies the link between the individual's ideas and the resulting object – the place where idea becomes object. The process through which this transformation occurs is, according to the artists I worked with, intimately linked to the studio space and the way in which it has been constructed, constituted and enacted. The

studio is, in this context, essential to facilitating the achievement of the desired individual creative objectives of the artists. Central to this notion is the sheer practical fact of having a dedicated focal point that is a discretely designated place of transformation, a place that is conceptualised in that way in terms of its physical characteristics, but also because of the way in which it is conceptually constructed and understood as the artist's 'creative space'. The processes of creative transformation are both cerebral and physical in nature, and may involve a range of activities to construct the right kind of space, including listening to music, ritualistically managing tools or artifacts, or meditating or reflecting. In this capacity, Barry describes the process of re-creating the atmosphere of his studio before every work session.

Coffee, jazz, paints and turpentine are always a feature of the beginning of my day in the studio. I like to get into the studio at around ten or eleven in the morning after we have had our family breakfast and done a few chores... I usually work for about 4 hours at a time and then I take over care of our daughter [who is home schooled], and my wife does a couple of hours work in her studio before we come together again for dinner'. I have been in the studio to witness the coffee, jazz, paints and turpentine ritual on a number of occasions and there is a strong consistency and rhythm to the processes that transpire throughout the ritual. Barry always starts in the kitchen by grinding fresh beans which are then made into coffee in a large plunger. He carries the plunger and cup(s) into the studio and serves out the coffee once he gets there. The coffee cup has a home on a small table next to Barry's easel, which stands at the very end of the long studio space. The CD player is at the other end of the studio and Barry's next move is to choose a jazz CD and put it on. The music, played quite loudly, immediately changes the mood of the room. Barry then makes his way to his easel, picks up his coffee, and standing about one metre away from the painting he is currently working on, he spends about five minutes just looking at the painting in order to 'figure out what needs to be done next'. He has a photo that has been taken at the local beach which forms the basis of the painting, and he compares the painting to the photo 'not so I can copy it verbatim, but so I can identify the elements I like the most that I definitely want to put in the painting.' Once Barry has identified the next steps for his painting he pours his turpentine into a clean jar, selects the paints and brushes he will need, and mixes the colour palette that is required. The smell of coffee is replaced by the smell of natural turpentine and the day of work begins.

(Howe-Piening 2007)

Barry's ritual for re-establishing his creative space had similarities with many of the rituals performed across the other studios that were part of my fieldwork research. There were, of course, always a range of varied individual expressions associated with the creation of the 'zone', but the ways in which these elements were applied to the studio space always appeared to align with the broader identity projects taking place in the studios in terms of the way in which my artists constructed and maintained their spaces through the vehicle of material culture. In the case of Barry, the sophisticated and rhythmic animation of the studio, through the utilisation of jazz music, aligned with his broader view of himself as an artist with an avant-garde perspective originating out of a certain time period (the 1950's - 60's). The other personalized elements of material culture within Barry's studio also

mirrored this self image, and included many publications, posters and books on the works of popular artists of that time period.

5.5 CONCLUSION

The practical doing of art, both from a professional and a personal perspective requires the conscious construction of a space to work. In this capacity, this chapter asserts that the artist's studio holds a highly significant place in the life and work of my informants. The spatial elements of the studio satisfies the multiple needs of the artist to have a practical and user friendly space, whilst being able to fully express oneself as a unique social and political agent. The studio, as a central focus in the practice of being an artist, supports and reflects the special social category and position that artists occupy, and this multilayered understanding of themselves and their position is built into the mix of professional and personal aspects that integrate within the space. The complexity of the space was articulated through exploring the way in which artists continuously negotiate the tension between the domestic and the professional arenas of an artist's life, and it was demonstrated through this discussion that in managing this complexity, artists experience degrees of blending of the two arenas, which can have both positive and negative implications for the work and private life of the individuals involved. This, however, is usually tolerated well and is generally understood to be a normal part of the holistic and all encompassing role of artist. The nature of the studio extended beyond the arena of the workspace and was described as a highly social space that plays a key role in presenting and maintaining the identity of the artist. This was demonstrated to be achieved in terms of the highly conscious material organisation of the workspace, including the choosing and placing of significant objects or symbols speaking directly to the artist's social identity and agendas, or of the strong traditions that maintain an importance presence in supporting and legitimising the artist's role. The artist's studio was also routinely understood as a transformational space that facilitated the making of an object from concept to artwork. The complex nature of this 'magical' process was one that combined the traditional or ritual embodied use and enrichment of the studio space in order to create a zone for the transformation to occur. This process was ongoing and cyclic in nature and included the utilisation of material objects such as particular materials or tools, ritual such as coffee time or specific periods of reflection, and the use of sound or light as a means to create an atmosphere that facilitated the creation process.

The way in which the studio space is conceptualised, constructed, utilised and experienced by the artists I worked with, therefore, speaks to its critical importance to the practice of being an artist. The whole of the artist has been shown to be invested in the ongoing functioning of this unique workspace, which requires their ongoing energy and agency to maintain the spaces, boundaries, materials and zones that are at its core. The next chapter changes the focus from the meaning making of artists' spaces to the making of meaningful objects that also support the agency and identity of the artist, and speak to the world in which the artist lives and works.

CHAPTER 6

MEDIATING MATERIALITY

6.1. INTRODUCTION

As a natural part of participating in a strongly object focussed profession, visual artists work with 'things' in a way that must be considered to be highly materially focussed and conscious. This high level of consciousness ranges from making carefully thought out decisions about the character and the nature of the materials that will be used in the production of their artworks, through to the way that these materials will be applied or manipulated and, of course, in the way that the finished products embody meaning and ideas. It could be said that the main aim of the visual artist is to use the material world in order to convert an idea, which initially exists in the mind of the artist, into a tangible physical object that (hopefully) is successful in conveying that idea to the wider world. Working within this broad context, this chapter focuses on the artworks that the artist produces to explore the way in which meaning, ideas, concepts and issues are consciously applied, asserted and disseminated through the artworks being made and presented. What emerges in the discussion of the way in which artworks are conceptualised and understood is a strong sense of the importance of the material object in providing a vehicle for extending the agency and experience of the individual artist. In this capacity the artwork allows the artist to be present in the world, and to express their ideas and experience, even when they are not physically present in space themselves. The need for the artwork to express something of themselves to the wider world is demonstrated to be an important element in being an artist, and one which can be seen to lend a unique subjectivity to the profession (or vocation) that is very often not evident in many other professions. This provides further evidence for understanding the special social position that artists occupy, and in this capacity I explore the notion of the artist as cultural facilitator by assuming a focus on exploring some of the socially and culturally active, and materially focused aspects of art and art making.. Within this frame of reference, and using my ethnographic field research as the basis for my argument, I make the point that the artworks and artistic material culture created and utilised by artists maintains a central place in the dissemination of their personal social identities, agendas, beliefs and experiences. The ethnographic data I present also reveals that artists can, and often do, work in a manner that is in alignment

with the generally held view that art is socially and culturally facilitative – something that would seem to be evident by our public funding of galleries, public artworks, and other various art production and education programs.¹⁷

Within the context of art as a culturally and personally facilitative medium, I highlight the variety of ways in which the artists I worked with constructed and applied their artworks in order to support the development and maintenance of a sense of both their public life and work as artist as social and cultural facilitator, and of their private social worlds, including of their core objectives where their personal political, emotional and social issues and needs are concerned. This chapter also provides insight into the ways in which my informants conceptualised and characterised the careful and considered execution and presentation of artworks that were imbued with the ‘personality’ of the artist, and could function as a kind of replacement for them in the public arena, thus extending their social agency out into the wider world. This careful and detailed consideration of the material aspects of the planned artwork strongly supported the development of a resulting product that, in the eyes of the artist, possessed a materially meaningful capacity to successfully assume the role of presenting and driving their social agendas and ideas in their absence (or alongside of them in some cases). Within this context I present a range of ethnographic data that illustrates the breadth of the social and cultural engagement inherent in the artworks being produced, but also touches on the multilayered aspects of their functionality as social things with multiple potential meanings. This necessarily incorporates a discussion of the way in which meaning, when conveyed through symbolic or abstract means such as material culture, is somewhat fragile and mutable. This is something that is recognised as a potential risk in the production and presentation of artworks and is, therefore, something that is considered and managed during these processes.

6.2. MATERIAL, OBJECTS AND MEANING

¹⁷ In this capacity ABS data for the 2011-2 period cites the ‘Australian Government funded expenditure on Arts and Culture as being \$1,744.5m’ (ABS 2012). The South Australian component of that expenditure figure was \$262.1m, which included expenditure for cultural heritage, museums, media, institutions and a range of art based activities and programs (ABS 2013: 1-3). The scope of public funding for the Arts in South Australia also extends to the local government arena, where there is a strong policy position across all council areas in relation to supporting the full range of arts disciplines, including public art and community arts projects and events (see LGA 2014).

The production of meaningful objects, when explored as an inherent part of being an artist, is a complex phenomena to articulate given the deeply ingrained, and often implicit, interconnectedness of this field to the more general cultural use of objects in the construction and maintenance of social knowledge, meaning and practice. Objects play an important part in how we imagine ourselves, our communities and our cultures. They allow people to attach materiality to otherwise abstract notions of belonging and identity and thereby give these notions a practical and tactile character, a physical presence, which can be used to facilitate social relations with others, and to demonstrate interconnections within a social setting. Furthermore, as people within any given society can usually claim to possess multiple layers of identities, including national, ethnic, class, religious political, gender and kinship, it is likely that there is considerable scope to make use of a wide variety of objects in order to symbolise diverse identity projects, histories, concerns, issues and experiences (Osborne 2001, Smith 1999, Jarman 1998).

The focus on objects as being an important indicator of people's identity is a field of inquiry that is multi-disciplined and is predominantly focused on exploring the social and cultural importance of objects in the world within a very broad range of contexts. Miller affirms this notion when asserting that 'the point that things matter can now be argued to have been made' (Miller 1998:3). In this capacity material culture has been studied with increasing frequency across a variety of disciplines including most commonly in archaeology (see Clunas 1991, Lubar and Kingery 1993), but also increasingly in anthropology (see Baudrillard 1996, Miller 1987, Appadurai 1986, McCracken 1990, Attfield 2000, Douglas and Isherwood 1979), history (see Lubar and Kingery 1993, Pounds 1989), sociology (see Bourdieu 1984, Dant 1999, Woodward 2002), social psychology (see Dittmar 1992), and visual arts and aesthetics (see Bartley 2002, Attfield 2000). This multi-disciplinary interest in the field has led to a variety of methodologies and foci being used besides the traditional ethnographic approach of the anthropologist.

Established opinion in social research suggests that all objects are, in some sense, socially indexical (Appadurai 1986, Kopytoff 1986, Douglas and Isherwood 1979, McCracken 1990, Miller 1998, Baudrillard 1996, Bourdieu 1984). By this I mean to say that they have some social meaning that can be read, understood and shared widely amongst cultural or sub-cultural groups. In addition to this notion, these meanings have the tendency to be mediated through many different layers of context amongst which are such things as time, place and gender. These generally accepted understandings of contextual significance form

part of the knowledge base that members of certain groups develop as a consequence of living in, and being part of, a society (Geertz 1973, Schneider 1980, Sahlins 1976). For example a simple bunch of flowers may have a number of shared meanings. Although flowers themselves are naturally occurring objects and, therefore, have not been manufactured as such, the making of a 'bunch' of flowers has involved a whole range of manufacturing and marketing processes in order for it to be presented for sale as a commodity. The flowers' natural characteristics, however, play a large part in their desirability, which shapes the way that they are conceptualised and used (Lash and Urry 1994: 292-305, Chevalier 1998). Flowers are very often given as a gift and are seen as a way of letting recipients know that the giver values them. They represent the beauty of nature and because they are ephemeral, they are considered a somewhat luxurious commodity in that the giver spends money on something that will not last even more than a few days. The ephemerality that is a characteristic of flowers is mirrored in the ephemeral or liminal, albeit sometimes life-altering, nature of the occasions that flowers are often used for, such as birthdays, funerals and hospital visits. This could be seen in opposition to giving someone something lasting to celebrate an occasion that may be seen to be a long-term undertaking such as giving someone an expensive, non-disposable pen when they get their first adult job, for example. The contextual layers, those that are implicitly understood by members of a society, define the details of variations on the rules of interpretation. For example the meaning of a young man giving a bunch of flowers to a young woman just before they are about to go out to dinner, is interpreted in a different way to the act of giving a bunch of flowers to someone at a funeral or when visiting them in hospital. It would also be considered socially appropriate to choose different types of flowers at each event. For example, at the funeral it might be likely for someone to choose flowers such as lillies, but the kinds of flowers that are chosen for the hospital patient would depend on the relationship between the two people involved, therefore requiring the application of further layers of understanding of social contexts. We would expect that the young man, going out for the first time, might choose flowers such as roses to give to his companion as they traditionally have romantic symbolism attached to them. It would also be unusual for the woman to give the man flowers as it is seen as the type of gift that usually only women receive. Women can, however, gift flowers to other women. This gendered use of objects is a common phenomenon within most societies and indicates the value of material culture in maintaining the status of these kinds of relations within society. (Gordon 1997:237-252, McCracken 1997:443-457, Miller 1997:17, Ewan and Ewan 1992:75) As can be seen from this example, there are a range of culturally specific, yet often implicit, rules for reading

and utilising a bunch of flowers, and indeed, this applies to all forms of material culture, including artworks.

The interpretation of the meaning of objects is also subject to a great deal of variation depending on the subjective application of layers of contextual elements, including more personally constructed meanings that have been attributed to objects through a process of building and re-presenting narratives. Combinations of contextual interpretations are also possible, making research into the meaning of artworks a potentially complicated exercise. Within this context objects, including artworks, can be interpreted in idiosyncratic ways by specific 'sub-cultural'¹⁸ groups, and these interpretations can be applied as a way of asserting belonging to those groups, or as a means of establishing and upholding one's own individual sense of identity within a group. (Anderson 1989, Appadurai 1990) As McCracken explains 'one of the most important ways in which cultural categories are substantiated is through the material objects of a culture...[which] are created according to a blueprint of culture and to this extent they make the categories of this blueprint material.' (McCracken 1994:74)

Within contemporary industrialised societies, that are characterised by their consumptive behaviours, the act of consumption is one of the ways that offers individual participants of that society the chance to create meaning, or packages of meaning, that support the construction of individual expressions of self. In this capacity Chevalier describes the process of using widely available objects to support the creation of identities that are inalienable through a process of 'creative appropriation' (Chevalier 1998:47). This creative appropriation allows people to construct complex levels of identity using products that have been assigned certain social meanings. This construction of meaning occurs in a number of ways including through the temporal and contextual accumulation of meaning, which could be described as a process where something develops meaning over a period of time through its interaction with culture. Constructions of meaning may also happen through a more formal and intentional process of meaning making such as advertising and marketing (McCracken 1991). Being creative with their appropriation of objects implies mixing and matching elements of already established understandings with individual interpretations to create a complex web of meanings and symbols that represent the complexity of the individuals themselves. Levi-Strauss referred to this type of phenomenon as bricolage, in

¹⁸ See Hebdige (1979) for more information on sub-cultures.

which he posited the idea that human nature is one of perpetual improvisation where whatever resources are on hand are used creatively to construct meaningful physical and symbolic life-worlds (Levi-Strauss 1974).

Material culture within the discrete discipline of anthropology has some antecedents in the work of Malinowski (1978) and his interest in the exchange rites of the Kula, in Mauss' exploration of gift giving and reciprocity (1950) and in the structuralist examination of the Kabyle house by Bourdieu (1977), amongst others (Barthes 1973, Baudrillard 1996). Since the 1980's the anthropological involvement in material culture, and its attendant studies of consumption, has come into its own and interest in this field of inquiry has increased significantly due to the fact that it offers such a diverse range of opportunities to discover the social and cultural life of people through the significance of the objects in their lives. A range of approaches to the study of material culture, although not always anthropological in origin, have occasionally been utilised successfully within the field of anthropology. These can be separated into a number of areas including semiotics, which takes the approach of viewing material objects as having textual and indexical qualities which can be interpreted through acquiring an understanding of the dominant social meanings that have been attached to them. Through the common understandings of these meanings these signs can be used or manipulated within culture to represent and perpetuate a range of social ideologies (McCracken 1990, Baudrillard 1996, Barthes 1973). Other approaches focus on the study of objects as economic goods or commodities and may examine the way that they are produced or the manner in which they are consumed. (Appaddurai 1987, Douglas and Isherwood 1979, Miller 1997). Still further approaches take these aforementioned issues into account but also consider the way that objects come to occupy space in the lived world, including the ways in which they are absorbed into, and utilised in, a range of different contexts that clearly demonstrate how ideas about the inherent nature of objects, as removed from its means of production (such as discussed in theories of commodity fetishism) can be disputed. This approach has led to further investigation into the way that objects come to occupy space in the lived world and the means through which they are absorbed into and utilised in a range of different contexts. Miller uses the example of Coca-Cola in Trinidad to illustrate this process. Coca Cola is generally associated with a dominant range of inherent meanings that have largely been constructed through advertising and marketing processes. In Trinidad, however, Miller discovered that those dominant meanings had been supplanted with a complex range of local and culturally specific meanings (Miller 1998: 169-187). This process is often referred to as

Hybridisation or Creolisation. Artists may also possess specific understandings of certain cultural objects that deviate from popular meanings and this may influence the way they use these objects in their work. An example of this is Klaus Staek's artwork *Back to Nature*. Staek creatively appropriated a range of easily identifiable historical and contemporary cultural images in this work to make a statement about the effect of globalisation on culture. One of the readily identifiable icons that he used was a pile of discarded Coca-Cola cans, presumably to represent the global incursion of large corporations into people's lives and its impact on both nature and culture. I bring attention to this because it alludes to the fact that Staek was interpreting what Coca-Cola means in a different way than that of the mainstream, where it is presented in the media as a source of youth, fun and togetherness. The different understanding of Coke that Staek presents may be individual in nature or, more likely, as evidenced in the Trinidadian case, is the result of his identification with a social group that also interprets Coca-Cola in an alternative way. Due to the ubiquitous and high level of the nature of Coca-Cola marketing, Staek was likely to be aware of the mainstream associations of Coca-Cola cans and used the highly identifiable red and white objects within a particular, and possibly contentious, context to present his alternative vision of Coca-Cola to his audience and hopefully, produce a heightened social awareness in them. As it was likely that Staek had a knowledge of the dominant mediated meanings that had already been constructed for the Coke can, his more alternative meanings can be seen to be a purposeful overlaying, or degrading, of that original meaning. In this vein, Hodson (2016) also considered that her artist informant's sculpture work provided a useful example to discuss the appropriation of materials in art:

She collects and refashions secondhand objects that hold some physical attraction to her and through their rearrangement in a new setting she plays between the familiarity of the object, its normative associations and its more poetic qualities. Discarded pieces of neon plastic woven around taut thread, knotted cloth, or balloons tethered to pieces of wood, are all given a new life through a process of re-imagination that focuses on how an object's identity can be manipulated...[and]...accorded a new status and value through drawing attention to alternative interpretations of the object's potential meaning and use

(Hodson 2016: 14).

The use of the symbolic object and materials in an alternative manner such as those described above does not necessarily deny the dominant meaning's existence, but rather aims to deny the constructed 'truth' of this dominant representation by presenting another way of seeing and understanding the object. Quoting Dryden (2001: 281) to support his analysis of the way in which graffiti artists 'actively imbued their images with particular facets of their personality and identity', Schacter concurs with Dryden's suggestion that

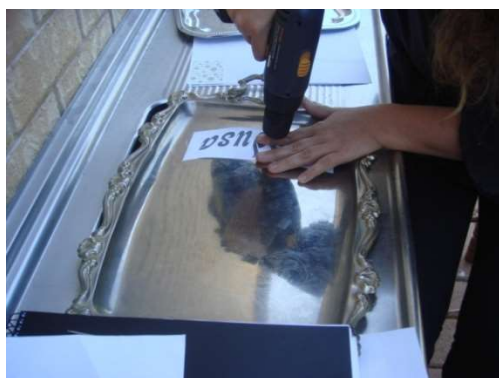
'artistic creation is a process of objectification...[in which]...the artist's insights into the dynamics of subjective experience are inseparable from the explorations of the expressive possibilities of some medium, their insights are set forth, worked out, and brought to completion through their *embodiment in an object*' (Dryden in Schacter 2014: 37).

6.3. MEANINGFUL ARTWORKS

Artworks, as unique elements in the world of material objects, are symbolic and indexical, but may also have a capacity to represent a number of different ideas when interpreted within the framework of different contexts. Artists understand their artworks as being very unique objects that, while they may contain elements of more culturally common meanings, have also woven within them strands of meaning that are derived from a more personal experience of the artist as the originator of the object. Within this context, whilst artworks are, ostensibly, consciously constructed with an inherent meaning attached to them, the artists I worked with were generally conscious themselves, as individuals working in a highly symbolic practice, of the possibility that slippage of meaning and subjective interpretation could occur. In the case of interpreting artworks, therefore, a normal level of interpretational skill and knowledge may be inadequate due to the highly (or multiply) symbolic, personal or political nature of many works, which renders them complex or idiosyncratic in some way. Art's position as symbolically significant is something that is considered to be a given within the profession, but the full impact of artworks as meaningful cultural objects may be something that can only become highly visible or tangible during times when art, for one reason or another, becomes a central part of social discourse, conflict or controversy. ¹⁹In this capacity, it can be seen that, in order for art objects to be able to be utilised as meaning carriers or disseminators, they must first, on some level, have already acquired a set of meanings specific to themselves, or to similar objects of their kind within a culture. With this in mind, the following case study, and those that come after it, make a small contribution to the exemplification of the inherent complexities involved in the production of art as meaningful, socially active object, particularly as it is constituted within the context of contemporary western art-making culture.

¹⁹ For example artworks such as Azlan McLennan's '*Proudly UnAustralian*' (2006), relies on its success through assuming that the viewer of the artwork understands the dominant meaning of the Australian flag as a carrier of positive national values.

Christina and I are in the small backyard of her outer suburban home, which she shares with her artist husband and their 9 year old daughter. There is a dedicated area at the side of the house which she uses for doing the ‘heavier’ bits of work that she deems unsuitable for her primary studio space, which is located on the top floor of the large modern two story house. Along the wall of the house she has a long trellis type table and sink area that is covered with old silver serving trays that have had words and phrases intricately drilled into them using a handyman type cordless drill. Christina picks up one of the trays that has a piece of paper with the word ‘medusa’ stuck to it. She starts to drill a series of small holes around the edges of the letters, eventually proceeding to filling all the defined areas with these small holes that work very successfully, in a visual sense, to articulate the letters she is creating. (Figures 9 and 10).



Figures 9 and 10. Medusa tray in progress.
(Howe-Piening 2007)

Christina explains that the series of trays she is making are a follow on from her *Lace Kitchen* series (see Figure 1), which explores her relationships, the role of her domestic family life and history, and how the relationships and activities that took place within her domestic environments informed her sense of her own cultural background and multicultural identity. In her exhibition statement she had this to say:

‘Lace Kitchen developed from kitchen sink conversations between Christina and her Oma, Hermina, during family visits at various stages of her developing years. ‘Running of the kitchen sink taps, froth of boiling dishwater, handling of pots and soaking of teatowel after teatowel gave way to Oma’s flowing verbal recollections of her homeland memories at her farm located in Heeten, The Netherlands. From Oma’s stories grew a fictional landscape

dotted with make-shift memories that burned acid rain tears into the very pans we scrubbed and dried'. *Lace Kitchen* becomes a 'fictional homeland' that communicates from the space between, a place created from Christina's maternal family's migration to Australia during the 1960's assimilationist years - where the process of losing language and cultural traditions is then communicated through imagery created by drilled holes into familiar kitchen objects and lit internally with candles.'

(Howe-Piening 2007)

Christina tells me that this new series of trays are supposed to evoke feelings of 'thoughtfulness, warmth and understanding regarding the social role of the contemporary homemaker, particularly within a blended family'. Christina explains that, as the second wife of her husband, she has had to work hard to legitimise her public role as his wife, and of her status as mother and homemaker within that context. As an artist, she felt the need to express the frustration of that position through the use of some carefully chosen, and sometimes quite harsh, text and phrases. Those words, she tells me, have been used by others in the past to characterise her, as the 'new and highly flawed wife'. The pain of her rejection in this sense has motivated Christina to put those, usually whispered, words on full public display. I ask Christina if it is important for her to make art that sends a message to the viewer....she said:

My art doesn't always have to be sending a message, but I guess it is always 'saying' or expressing something about me' responding to my query on this remark, Christina goes on to explain: 'what I mean is that there is always a bit of 'me' in the art that I put out there...sometimes I might be wanting to send a message or say something very definite about an issue, sometimes I am just responding to a conceptual idea, like when I am applying for a commission with a specific brief, and sometimes it is me expressing something about myself.....you know, what's happening emotionally for me, with my family or something...

(Howe-Piening 2007)

The diversity of potential symbolic combinations and individual perspectives being applied to artworks, and the consequent difficulty of interpreting such objects, provides a level of support for the opinion that art is problematic where the address of social issues are concerned. Christina's *Lace Kitchen* (Figure 1) provides an example of the way in which the artist has drawn on highly personal experiences, combined with a range of symbolic elements, to develop a narrative that explores the role of domestic family life and history in the construction of individual identity. The artist is making a personal statement about a social matter, which unfortunately, may have the effect of complicating the message for the audience.

The notion of the art object as being socially active has support in the work of Gell (2003), and of the proponents of Material Culture studies (see Douglas and Isherwood 1978, Bourdieu 1984, Appadurai 1986, Miller 1998), and in this vein, it can be demonstrated that the art made by the artists I worked with were, on the whole, much more than just aesthetic objects whose component parts could be appreciated visually, or read textually and symbolically. Rather, in examining the lived creation, and proposed and actual function, of these artworks, it can be argued that they have the capacity to be, and often are, socially active agents that can speak eloquently for, and raise the central issues that are important to, the individual artists who have made them. The artworks in this sense, therefore, are objects that are very consciously constructed, unique and connected with the lived worlds, social relationships and personhood of their artist originators.

In his discussion of the notion of art as social agent, Gell (1998) attempts to reveal the modes through which social agency is routinely exerted and he strongly asserts that a person's (in this case an artist's) agency is commonly exerted as a composite of both primary intentional agency and through the utilisation of secondary objects as agents. In terms of my own research it is apparent that the artists I worked with had a high level of awareness of the potential for their ideas, intentions and concerns to be transferred onto their artworks, and in this capacity, they often consciously produced objects with an intended purpose, whose attributed agency was designed to take an active place in the world beyond their studio. Christina's trays and her previous *Lace Kitchen* series speak of her desire to legitimize her own identity as a contemporary Australian women, wife and mother through exploring and problematising the often overlooked role of the woman in the domestic sphere, and in articulating the moral questions that arise out of traditional notions of marriage and womanhood. When reflecting on her appropriation and manipulation of traditional western domestic artifacts, such as serving trays, roasting pans and teapots, Christina told me that she chose them because they have a strong emotional attachment for herself, and for most people, and...

'because so much of what we remember of our lives as children is tied to the home, the kitchen and the mother figure doing her thing in those environments....Once you have people emotionally engaged, then those feelings can be overlaid with a range of other ideas that make them think more widely about the experiences of women in the domestic sphere and how their situations have changed over the years.'

(Howe-Piening 2007)

The creation of art objects, such as those made by Christina, can be seen to be a way in which artists are able to exert an engaging presence and impact that supports or elicits the genesis of social awareness within people, or encourages the transformation of social worlds in some, perhaps quite subtle, way. This seems like a very ambitious task for a mere artwork to achieve, and in order to make this ‘magic’ work, artists are seen to be required to possess a number of key combined components. These include the ability to exercise conceptual and visual communication prowess in the application of intimate cultural knowledge (such as in the careful selection and manipulation of domestic artefacts in *Lace Kitchen*), and to demonstrate a significant level of technical virtuosity, which has otherwise also been referred to as artistic talent (in the above case we might consider the strong role that composition plays in the success of the *Lace Kitchen* objects). These elements, when combined within the artist, are seen as a unique skill set that make artists a socially distinctive, and culturally significant, group who are given a certain latitude to explore culturally difficult, painful and controversial issues, and thereby, who also possess the perceived ability to elicit strong reactions, robust dialogue, and/or ideological changes, in their audiences.

The talent an artist expresses must also be accompanied by an impetus for making meaningful art, which very strongly tends to be related to the depth of feeling an artist has for specific personal emotional, social or political agendas that they are experiencing or are aware of. This is what motivates them to make art with a message to convey. Ann says that she ‘finds that if I am feeling really stirred up by an emotional feeling or a personal or social issue, then I get really motivated to get an idea or thought out into the public, and my creative energies just flow so well. If, on the other hand, I am just trying to think of something to make for an exhibition that has been booked in, it can be so much harder to come up with ideas’ This was characterized very well by the difference in the way two of Ann’s collections came together during the time I was working with her. The first exhibition, *Anticipation*, was conceived of during a time when Ann was at a crossroads in her career because of both financial and health reasons. Ann says that she was seriously considering ‘hanging up her paintbrushes’, and thought that she might make her next exhibition (which turned out to be *Anticipation*) her last one. This situational uncertainty, and the associated issues that arose around notions of the human implications of vocations and lifeworks, talent, social status, mortality, grief, family, identity and purpose, provided Ann with an enormous amount of creative motivation and energy, which she invested into the artworks she was making. In her words, Ann ‘expressed all of my fear and hopes for the

future in that series...and it's something that I think connected on lots of levels with the human condition'. The exhibition's opening speech, which prepared and presented by an art academic that Ann had known for many years, discussed the notion of the exhibition functioning on an abstract symbolic level that represented renewal and anticipation through the symbolic vehicles of the egg, the hand and the pod unfolding (Figures 11 and 12).



Figures 11 and 12: Eggs 1&2
Pieces from Ann's *Anticipation* Exhibition
Photo courtesy of the artist

The speech also highlighted the personal nature of the content within the exhibition by characterising them as emblematic of a new beginning and a new phase in Ann's long and diverse career...one that was also characterised by a strong feeling of anticipation. These elements presented in the exhibition can be said to be symbolic examples of humanity, renewal and rebirth within a contemporary western cultural context, particularly within the Judeo/Christian tradition, and its Pagan predecessors. They bring to mind the memory of Easter and its rebirth message, and of Michelangelo's 'The Creation of Adam' in the Sistine Chapel, in which Adam is given life through the touching of hands with God. Ann's exhibition also contained works representing a Phoenix (Figure 13.), which in many ways

is the ultimate rebirth symbol. In Ann's Phoenix, however, there is still some anticipation as to when the bird will rise from the Ashes.



Figure 13: Phoenix
from Ann's *Anticipation* Exhibition
Photo courtesy of the artist

A review of *Anticipation* in a national arts magazine focused on the exhibition through an examination of its function on three different levels, which included the abstract symbolic, the personal, and the socio-economic. Jean Paul Sartre's concept of 'existential despair' was also referenced during the review, with the suggestion that it is sometimes necessary to 'go down to the dark night of the soul' before we can again take control of our lives and work our way back to the light and to creativity. The socio-economic reading of the exhibition focused on the assertion that Ann's use of objects from Nature was symbolic of a new global order in the arts that was linked to political and environmental agenda, as well as the prevailing movement of trends within the contemporary art world. The reviewer himself highlighted the strong emotive projection of the exhibition:

In her artist's statement for the catalogue...[the artist] 'deconstructs' the exhibition's title as an -'ti - s & - pA - sh & n. Within that drawn-out phonetic restructuring there's a suggestion of an inner struggle. And a hope that things will turn out all right. In many ways this complex reworking of the exhibition's title reflects both the make-up and the content of the exhibition. Behind every small offering (and this is an exhibition of many offerings), behind the superb craft and humour, one senses that there has been a harrowing inner journey towards renewal
(Hamilton 2007)

In contrast to the first 'Anticipation' exhibition, 'Anticipation 2' was more of a struggle for Ann who had been buoyed by her initial success and the feeling that she was, in some

ways, being reborn through her decision to continue on with art making. The decision to do *Anticipation 2* was brought about through a number of circumstances, including having been offered an exhibition space at a local art gallery and having leftover pieces that did not make it into the original Anticipation exhibition. The original exhibition, whilst being a collection of individual objects, had a very cohesive thematic character to it, which was expressed through the repeated representation of renewal and nurturing symbols such as the egg, hand, pod and phoenix. This created a strong narrative for the audience, which didn't require much additional interpretation or eliciting of a connection with the artwork (as these are culturally recognisable and emotive symbols). *Anticipation 2*, however, did not benefit from the same cohesive character and was much more disparate in both its preparation and the subsequent content and presentation. There were forty different pieces presented at *Anticipation 2*, including a range of eight painted frames (Figure 14.), a number of mixed media drawings, some collections of personal objects encased in containers, and one silver brooch spelling out Ann's phonetic version of the word (An-'ti-s&-pA-sh&n), which she had commissioned to be made by a jeweller friend. I asked Ann about the diversity of the pieces in the exhibition and she reflected that her artistic style never really stays the same, but had always been informed by what was happening in her personal life and in the social and political world. She said that she regularly uses a range of materials and techniques in her work, including painting, drawing, photography and sculpture, and often incorporates found materials from a range of sources that include the industrial and natural world, parts of toys, feathers, old shoe lasts, eggs, wooden artefacts, crystals and glass (to name a few). Ann told me that someone from the SA Art Gallery had once told her that her style was that her work was always changing. She agreed with that assessment. Within that context, Ann considered this exhibition to be strongly consistent with her style as an artist, and she felt that the way in which she had delved deeply into the material culture of her studio to source the things with which to make her work, demonstrated a strong personal connection with the pieces in the show.

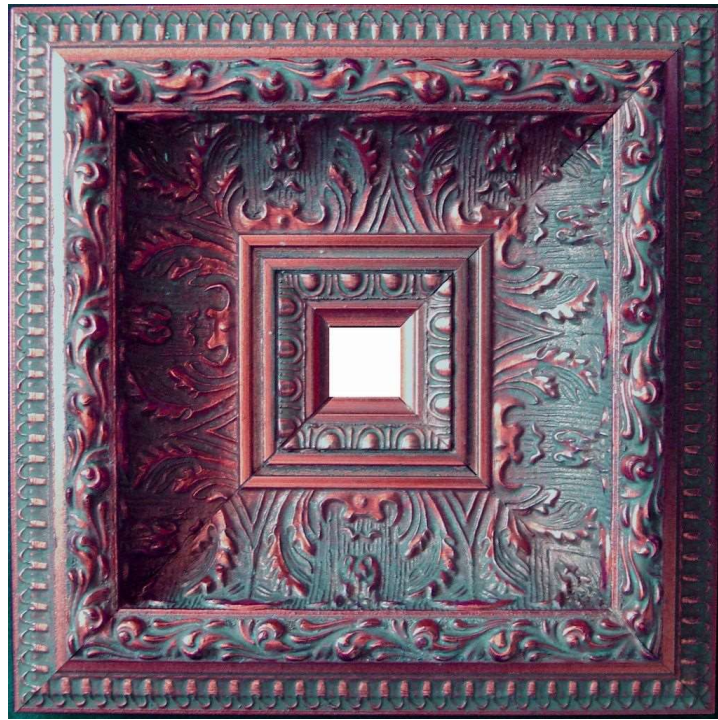


Figure 14. Frame
Anticipation 2 Exhibition
Photo courtesy of the artist

The nature of the *Anticipation 2* exhibition, and the artworks Ann produced for it, were understood as ‘reflecting my personal decision to continue working as an artist by using only things that I have found in my studio (and around my house), which I have collected over the past forty years or more’. Ann characterised both exhibitions as being ‘very personal’, which can be evidenced by the whimsical, personal and abstract nature of the textual descriptions that accompanied the exhibition, including the exhibition statement that was prepared by Ann and displayed at both exhibitions (with original formatting):

TO

Idea to object....a process...a space between.

‘Anticipation is a lovely word’

This is a sentence if found when I looked further than the Thesaurus and dictionary definitions to the psychology of the work and its complexities, a lovely word.

But the phonetic spelling fascinated me, the letters created a physical analogue of the feeling, the spacing almost becoming the preposition ‘to’, anticipating its own meaning. And it looks so good!

An-’ti-s&-pA-sh&n

How can one relate that to an object, one object, a set of objects? I present myself with a challenge that is always present in creating, making, handling materials to make something else, (and when does the material start to anticipate itself).

Idea to object, object to idea, object to image.

The work looks different, but then again, it usually does,

So perhaps its not so different.

I don't conform to a 'style'...except my haircut.

My life was changing, indeed, from a dark place to a light, a passage of age and circumstance that caused me to reflect upon my resources, both internal and my physical collections of 'stuffs'(the collections themselves anticipating their usefulness to my processes). I wanted to see positivity in an otherwise gloomy climate of the politics of fear...a bit of sunshine.

Idea to object, object to idea, artist to audience.

'Anticipation is a lovely word'

Perhaps I just wanted to make some lovely things and make you smile.

(Newmarch 2007)

The statement places the exhibition in a contextual framework that allows the audience to have an insight into its personal nature and to understand and connect with the diversity of objects that were presented to them, particularly when viewing the works in *Anticipation 2*. When reflecting on the statement, however, Ann felt that it was not so much an interpretational guide as it was a musing and personal declaration that would provide insight into herself as opposed to the art objects.

Feminist artist and writer Lucy Lippard contends that art has the potential to act as a mirror to reflect hidden or controversial aspects of society and social relations, and to be a means through which unofficial knowledge or alternative perspectives can be transmitted. Art, therefore, can be seen to possess the capacity to function as a form of resistance, or as a means through which complex issues or critiques can be raised and explored in relation to, often implicit and taken for granted, social norms and institutions (Lippard 1995: 72). This more politically active kind of art was also produced by my informants, sometimes as a central and ongoing part of their work, and for other artists only occasionally when they felt there was an issue that was considered too important to ignore. Making controversial political art is not unusual for artists, but is also not without its difficulties, including the objections relating to whether that kind of art is either appropriate or effective. The notion that art can be an efficient and appropriate active tool for social and political change is still a contentious one which is often subject to criticism. These arguments and discussions have

played out in a range of settings, both from within and external to the art community, but primarily from within the media, academia, and across industries that are often the targets of such action. Much of this argument centres around notions of censorship and freedom of speech versus public decency and the protection of moral and ethical values. Within this context, a number of the artists I worked with also had experiences in producing works that elicited strong negative responses from an audience who felt that the object was inappropriate for public display due to the controversial or upsetting nature of the subject matter or how it was represented. Sally is a sculptor and jeweller who describes her work as mostly a mixture of interesting and meaningful.

It is important for me to make pieces that are in some way stimulating to look at, but that also have a story that goes along with them. This relates as much to the jewellery I make as to the sculpture, though sculpture is probably considered to be a bit more of an appropriate medium for conveying meaning.

(Howe-Piening 2007)

Sally showed me some pictures of an artwork she made while she was still at art school which didn't quite fit an aesthetic norm and elicited some quite negative responses. She explained the work, entitled *Lift and Separate*²⁰, which depicted the progression of stages of a relationship, from beginning to breakdown, as told from the woman's perspective. Sally tells me that the story is essentially her own, but that she heard the very same thing from so many women she met, that the work became the story of all those others as well. The story was told in 5 stages represented by 5 different 'bras'. The bras, which were about life size were made with a range of materials, the basis for each one consisting of a copper bra frame with latex inserts that were cast from the artist's own breasts. The bras were then adorned with different symbolic elements representing the relationship stages.

The first bra represented the romantic first stage of the relationship. Sally depicted this by painstakingly attaching tiny red flowers over the entire breast area of the bra (red flowers meant to symbolise love and passion), and enhanced this by cutting words and symbols into the copperplate border. The symbols were mostly love hearts and crosses (for kisses), and the words included 'love', 'passion', 'future' and 'romance'.

The second bra was a depiction of the marriage stage, the next logical and more serious progression in the relationship journey. The 'breast' of this bra was made in decoupage

²⁰ *Lift and Separate* is a reference to the old Playtex Cross Your Heart bra advertisement from the 1960's.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2aFYCYiSdKw>

style and Sally chose images of wedding paraphernalia of all kinds, including cakes, brides and grooms, veils, dresses, bouquets and the like. In the copperplate border of this bra were cut dollar signs, doves, entwined rings and champagne glasses, together with the words 'forever', 'honeymoon', 'fidelity', and 'future'.

The third bra heralded to arrival of a baby and was the simplest of the bras in terms of its appearance and treatment. The skin coloured latex 'breast' was left natural, except for the addition of two clear silicone teats with tiny plastic baby dolls squeezed inside, which were attached to each nipple on the breasts. The images included storks (of course), babies and pins, and the words included 'family', 'responsibility', 'growth', and 'future'.

The fourth bra depicted, as Sally put it, 'the 'heads down, bum up' period of a relationship where everything is work, money is tight, responsibility is heavy and no-one feels appreciated'. This bra had coins, which had been beaten with a hammer and patinated black, attached to all areas of the 'breast' except for on the nipple. The nipple had been overlaid with a cast bronze nipple (taken from the same mold as the latex breast). The nipple had also been patinated in a black colour. Sally said that this blackness symbolised the impending darkness descending over the relationship as a result of too much responsibility. The symbols were handcuffs, dollar signs and houses, and the text included the words 'heavy', 'money', 'work' and 'future'.

The fifth and final bra was by far the most confronting. This bra utilised the skin like qualities of the latex to depict a physical manifestation of the psychological trauma experienced during a relationship breakup. The 'breast' had been sliced and coloured red in places to look like cut skin and pieces of sharp broken glass had been placed so that they jutted out of the 'flesh wounds'. The symbols cut into the copperplate were of a broken heart and the words were 'pain', 'loss', 'breaking', and 'alone'. There was a noticeable absence of the word 'future' in this last bra.

Lift and Separate was displayed running along a hallway at the art school and Sally said that she spent some time just hanging around anonymously to hear what people had to say about it. She said that she was somewhat shocked to hear some of the negative and angry reactions to the piece, particularly from fellow art students. The anger was primarily directed to two main issues. Either the viewer was angry with the assumption that the

traditional linear romantic partnering progression was depicted as inevitably ending in a breakup, or the viewer was angry about the way the final bra, which represented a traumatic breakup, was depicted as a fairly gruesome physical injury (which was being used as a metaphor for the psychological trauma being suffered). Sally said that she also had people she knew (both fellow students and friends) directly criticising her artwork because, while they generally considered the topic to be a legitimate one to address, they thought that the way it was visually expressed in some parts would put people off. The reasoning behind that opinion was because those parts were ugly and unsettling, which went against the idea that art is supposed to be inherently aesthetically pleasing in some way. Sally agreed that the 'breakup bra' was confronting, but she asserted that the way in which she depicted that stage felt right to her. Her main motivation for producing *Lift and Separate*, in her words was to 'tell my own story in order to create a space of understanding and sisterhood with those other women who also have similar experiences' The criticism aimed at Sally regarding the lack of aesthetic appeal of her artwork feeds into a wider critical perspective, which asserts that art and social action should not be combined at all as it impacts on the artistic and aesthetic development and freedom of artists. For example, art critic, writer and researcher Robert Brunstein claims that 'culture is not designed to do the work of politics' (1995: 252). He extends upon this by asserting that artists who involve themselves with social action inevitably compromise their individual artistic perspective and subordinate their artistic and imaginative creativity to a cause [rather than a creative outcome] (Ibid: 251-258). This view was generally strongly refuted by Sally, and by the other artists I worked with, who mostly agreed that taking a social or political position in their art making was a means through which they could contribute further to their own creative development.

There are also those who doubt the efficacy of art to have the agency to produce the intended social impacts on the basis that art is too much of an elite activity that does not speak to ordinary people. In this capacity, aspirations associated with the social power of art are subject to much contention, as in the comments of Sharpe et al when asking, ' [to] what extent does this [ability to conceptualise art in the way intended by the artist] rely upon [knowledge of] an elitist language of art and politics?' (Sharpe et al 2005: 16). This highlights the possibility that the means through which the public receives and reads art may be dependent on their possession, or not, of certain learnt knowledge and understanding about art, aesthetics and political and social theory and issues. This uncertainty in relation to public interpretations leads to questions about whether it is

possible for a strong and consistent message to be disseminated and received as a result of exposure to the art being produced, or whether change is only possible in specific members of the public who have a certain level of knowledge. The process of meaning making and dissemination, therefore, is a key concern in this discussion in terms of the importance, for an artist, of being able to construct a material object that is designed to be symbolically read and understood in a specific way, in order to support the specific interpretations, social outcomes or dialogue that is desired. This process, however, is one that is fraught with difficulty due to the multiple possible interpretations that may be applied to any particular objects by various individuals with their own subjective understandings and agendas. This supports the notion that the appropriation and construction of meaning is fluid and is incontrovertibly subject to many influences that sit across the social and cultural spectrum, including through the application of specific cultural knowledge and creative appropriation (see Miller 1998 and Chevalier 1998). Ann's take on the interpretation of meaning in artworks is dependent upon the kind of art that is being produced, which she sees very much as being an issue of elitism in some segments of the art world. Her own work has continuously changed over the many years she has been working, and often alternates between the political and the personal, but she says that she always strives to make the work accessible to all people who may want to view what she makes. In this capacity she agrees with Sharpe et al (2005: 16) to some degree, in that there are many artworks being produced where the meanings behind the artworks are not understandable without the application of special knowledge or training:

I always had a huge problem with abstract art...it's so elite and alienating...how is a normal person supposed to get anything out of a canvas painted red, nothing else, just painted red? They have so many of these kind of things at the art gallery, which really annoys me because most of the people who go there are not educated in art, they don't have the kind of academic knowledge that you need to understand the meaning behind this kind of art. To them it is just a big wank...you hear it all the time when they say things like their 2 year old could have painted that and done a better job. What's the point if the art that artists are making can't speak to the people going to see it? Where is the dialogue happening.

(Howe-Piening 2006)

Ann then goes on to describe a time when she and some other artists engaged in some resistance around this issue:

Anyway, so a few people (mostly artists and a couple of philosophers) and myself went on an excursion to the art gallery and we went around and stuck different labels over the blurbs that sit next to the artworks. The labels simply said things like 'this is not art' and 'crap on canvas', amongst others. To me, the act of relabelling the artworks was more than just active art criticism. As an artist, I wanted to take a stand against those social forces that position art as something alienated from ordinary people, as something higher and more cultured than

them. I guess you could say what we did come from a Socialist agenda, we wanted to see more relatable art in the gallery. I like to think that my own art speaks to ordinary people and those who know about art because I work with images and ideas that everyone can relate to.
(Howe-Piening 2006)

The way in which these mainstream forms of disseminating ideas and knowledge about art are appropriated and subverted during the act of changing labels could be seen to be a precursor to the relatively recent activist art movements that have much more of a focus on the creative incitement of social discourse than on the production of meaningful objects. Movements such as Culture Jamming are a particular form of non-official art that is mostly concerned with the practice of resisting modern mass media and consumption through the utilisation and subversion of the symbols and artefacts that significantly represent these institutions. The underlying principle of Culture Jamming is that, since we live in a world where we are constantly bombarded with highly mediated and directive images, we are no longer able to make rational assessments about what is happening to our culture, and if this is so:

How can a rational critique even begin to address a worldview whose fundamental issues are not *true/false*, but *pleasure/pain*, *sexy/geeky*, *quality/rip-off*? Culture jamming sticks where rational discourse slides off. ... it uses the enemy's own resources to replicate itself-corporate logos, marketing psychology, clean typography, 'adspeak'... the message once deciphered, causes damage to blind belief....The best culture jamming is totally unexpected, surprising, shocking in its implications.

(Abrupt 2005)

The kind of culture jamming that Ann indulged in could, therefore, be seen as a means of producing 'damage to [the] blind belief' that is associated with the authority of interpretation over artworks that elite institutions and their agents hold. The action supports the elicitation of a kind of reality disjuncture in the viewing audience within the art museum and, through this disjuncture, increases the potential for reflexivity and change to occur in the way the audience perceives the art and the messages they are receiving about the authority of the institution itself. Artistic activities that are primarily undertaken to elicit social discourse and invite contestation have been an enduring part of an activist art scene since the modernist period. The work often involves the active appropriation of public spaces to perform and promote their often contentious social messages, and this kind of use of public spaces is considered to be a part of the broad concept of 'public good' that artists engage with. For example, McLennan's 'Proudly UnAustralian (2006), and works like 'We Are All Boat People' (Protection 2001) by an asylum seeker activist group,

appropriate iconic Australian public spaces to assert their political messages. While these artworks are primarily ephemeral in nature, the idea of using iconic Australian symbols and spaces to promote a contentious social message is a controversial, but effective, way to incite a public conversation about social issues.

Social actors, such as artists, who have an awareness of the interpretational complexity associated with their products, are able to skilfully utilise a range of strategies in order to negotiate and facilitate the successful interpretation of their artworks. In terms of the artists I worked with, the strategies they employed to support a more consistent interpretation of their artworks included the utilisation of tools to guide the audience to think about artworks in certain ways, such as through textual accompaniments (artist's statements), and the appropriation of universal symbolic elements that have clear, established, and relatively unambiguous meaning attached to them (such as a cross to symbolise Christianity, for example). For example Ann's Anticipation exhibition pieces strongly featured the culturally ubiquitous and generally well understood symbol of the egg, and combined with her previously cited exhibition statement, this provides guidance to the audience on the manner in which the artworks should be interpreted.

This need to support the meaning of an artwork can also be set against an additional complexity, which is that the artists themselves often have a stated ethos of not wanting to 'dictate' interpretations to the audience, which belies an often obvious desire to be heard in a quite specific way through their art. I assert that this position relates directly to a philosophical stance on the process of education or pedagogical influence, in which an authoritarian approach of 'this is what you should think' about something, is seen as being counterproductive in terms of enacting real and authentic reflection and change in the world. Rather, a reflexive approach to the individual interpretation and dissemination of ideas is encouraged, but is also prodded along the way with cues that often make it difficult to veer off course.

When considering the ways in which he constructs and disseminates meaning through his artworks, Gavin refuted the view that an audience must have specific kinds of knowledge, or a special ability to interpret symbols in order to gain anything from his work.

my work...[which is mainly about ecology, the construction of natural landscapes, and cultural notions of sustainability]...doesn't talk down to people, but I don't assume they know anything about Postmodernism or Aesthetics, or any other art theories that I learnt

about in art school. They are not even really things I focus on when I am making art myself. I am more interested in forging relationships with my viewers through making things kind of fun and engaging to look at. My collaborations with artists and communities over the years has made it pretty clear that there is a huge range of people out there who are making and looking at art...so it would be pretty foolish to cut those people off from my messages and ideas just because they don't have formal art knowledge. In my work, I tend to use natural and indigenous materials and put them together in a way that is kind of interactive for the audience...there is always quite a bit happening and the work is pretty representational. I also often use textual explanations with my work to help people connect with what I am trying to say...sometimes its obvious, other times more explanation is needed...it just depends on the particular piece or purpose.

(Howe-Piening 2008)

Gavin's use of the word 'relationship' to describe what is happening between the audience and his art implies that they are engaging in a personal and subjective engagement, not so much with inanimate objects, but more with surrogate persons. He cites this active engagement in the relationship as being something that strongly supports the audience's desire to understand the work, and presumably, be more fully engaged by the social or political ideas that are contained within them. When developing this idea within an anthropological framework Gell utilizes the semiotic term 'abduction' to indicate the way in which an indexical object can be used to infer meaning. He separates this from a purely semiotic interpretation by framing his form of abduction as something that 'functions to set bounds to linguistic semiosis proper, so that we cease to be tempted to apply linguistic models where they do not apply, while remaining free to posit inferences of a non-linguistic kind' (Gell 1998: 15). Gell goes on to point out that the means through which people ascertain the intentions and dispositions of 'social others' is through the vehicle of abduction and that there is little, if no, distinction between the nature of the abduction we enact upon 'social others' and those we enact upon indexical signs (such as artworks). Furthermore, Gell states the nature of the abductions that take place, in terms of his model, are related to the abduction of social agency, which refers not only to people but also to objects acting as social agents when 'enmeshed in a texture of social relationships' (Gell 1998:17).

Gell defines agency as being 'attributable to those persons (or things...) who/which are seen as initiating causal sequences of a particular type, that is, events caused by acts of mind or will or intention, rather than the mere concatenation of physical events' (Gell 1998:16). Gell makes the distinction between people as primary agents and everything else as potential secondary agents but points out that secondary agents are 'objective embodiments of the power or capacity to will their use, and hence moral entities in

themselves' (Gell 1998:21). To summarise, in his elucidation of the notion of social agent, which in this case refers to artists, Gell is attempting to reveal the modes through which social agency is routinely exerted and he argues that agency is commonly applied as a composite of both primary intentional agency and through the utilisation of secondary objects (the artworks), as agents. Gavin's utilisation of textual assistance, however, also strongly points to the perceived potential fallibility of relying purely on the symbolic elements of an artwork to convey meaning (or his agency). He, therefore, regularly makes use a range of textual assistance to present his work to the audience, including in the form of artist's statements, speeches by other 'experts' or information plates situated close to the individual artwork, which usually provide a title, material information, and often, a brief statement about the artwork. For example, in presenting his series of wood sculptures entitled *Chthonic Spirits* (Figure 15.), Gavin provided an artist's statement that led the audience to understand them as works that speak to Indigenous connections to the land:

The work engages the human psyche and its primal connectedness to the land. Small human-like figures of indigenous and non-indigenous timbers participate in the changing moods of land and sky. They allude to the human 'spirit of place', Indigenous and colonising, and a human presence over extended time. They watch, listen and speak, quietly. They tell a story. (Howe-Piening 2008)



Figure 15. *Chthonic Spirit*
2005.

Photo courtesy of the artist

Gavin's perspective on the artist's statement is that it provides a small insight into the works that allow them to be more deeply understood and appreciated, particularly for those who are not familiar with his work and interests, or with the definition of the word as pertaining to the earth or earthly spirits (usually in a Greek spiritual context). His desire to provide an entree into the messages he is presenting in his artwork, through providing textual accompaniment, is indicative of a ubiquitous need amongst artists to ensure the viewers of their artworks get the message right (or approximately so in any case). While this might not change the form that the artwork takes (in order to make it more accessible), it does elicit a strong socially active perspective in order to employ the strategies needed to achieve the desired outcomes.

6.4. CONCLUSION

As cultural facilitators, artists have a central role in producing material objects that give the audience something pertaining to their emotional or social experience of the world, upon which they are asked to reflect, relate to, or in some cases, react against. In this capacity, this chapter devotes considerable focus on understanding how the identity, agendas and social roles of artists are very consciously connected to, and facilitated by, the art objects they produce, and on how the meaning that is attached to an artwork is manufactured, disseminated, negotiated and ensured. The aim of this exercise was to understand and explain the artist's focus on the making of material objects with meaning, and of the way in which objects, more generally, are used socially as a means to symbolise, stabilise and solidify meaning for often intangible beliefs or notions. Miller's (1997) assertion that the case for the social importance of material objects has been substantially made is well supported by a wealth of cross disciplinary research, but the compelling nature of our relationships with objects drives us to continue to uncover the depth and breadth of the nuances and inter-relationships that are still to be discovered or explored. In this vein, it can be clearly seen that visual artists make sound research subjects within this diverse area, as they work in a highly materially focussed manner, and it could said, are considered to be more expert at symbolic representation than the average person may be.

The chapter provided a focus on my informants feelings of obligation and compulsion to provide a narrative of themselves or society through the objects they make, which is expressed as being a fulfilment of their role as cultural facilitator, and is viewed as a means through which they can construct and disseminate ideas and meaning that have an impact on their personal and social worlds. The way in which the making of material objects is

understood by artists, therefore, is as a way in which they can contribute to the representation or production of social dialogue, or cultural knowledge and practice, and as a way to express their inner emotional worlds and understandings of who they are on a personal level. The making of art, therefore, can be a highly subjective practice, but one that is, for the professional or semi-professional artist, also a publicly visible exercise that has a strong social investment attached to it. These two factors make for a complexity of practice that has the potential to support the creation of a huge and diverse range of objects that are compelling, stimulating and meaningful, but that may also be too difficult to read without the requisite background knowledge of the artist, the subject, art, specific social issues, or symbolic communication. The way in which art objects are understood, therefore, is cited as being the subject of some contention and contestation, both within and external to the art world. In this chapter I also argue that the artists I worked with utilised their art as agents in the social world, and that these products of the artist are representative of their specific experiences and understandings of the world. Working within this context, I explored the way in which my informants conceptualised and created their art pieces to speak for them in their absence, including very consciously building meaning and symbolism into their artworks in order to create a narrative for the pieces they were presenting. The chapter however, asserted that this consciously constructed meaning may be lost on the viewing audience and, in this capacity the examples I presented demonstrates the specificity of the meanings attached to artworks by artists, but presents a number of ways in which the works have been understood differently, either from an academic point of view, or another's subjective perspective. Whilst stating a reluctance to dictate the meaning of an artwork for their audience, it was demonstrated that artists also have an understanding of the complexity of interpretation that can occur, and so often rely on a range of tools in order to support the development of the 'right' way to think about an art piece. These tools are usually narrative or textual in nature and include the presentation of talks, internet and booklet statements, interviews, and most predominantly, the use of brief text based introductions to each artwork, with a minimum of information being a title and production and material details, and the maximum being a paragraph or more outlining the meaning of the artwork and its relation to the exhibition as a whole. The kinds of functional negotiations that are undertaken by artists in order to facilitate appropriate interpretations for their artworks demonstrates the potentially fluid and subjective nature of understanding socially significant symbols and symbolic narratives when they have been constructed through vehicle of art objects. The fact that this manner of mediating the world continues speaks to its enduring and compelling nature to stimulate engagement in both

artists and art viewers, and confirms its, and its makers, special place in terms of social agency and cultural production and maintenance.

This chapter, therefore has demonstrated the significance of the material objects that artists make - artworks, in terms of their capacity to hold and disseminate meaning, to elicit and guide social dialogue, cultural knowledge and practice, and to provide considerable agency and an expressive outlet for the artists themselves. The following chapter provides an additional focus on the way in which the presentation of artworks, and the artist, occurs through exploring the way in which artists' social and professional legitimacy is performed and mediated through their social relationships enacted in the planning and conduct of the art exhibition.

CHAPTER 7

EXHIBITING LEGITIMACY

7.1. INTRODUCTION

The chapter focuses on the artist's personal and public interactions with the wider social world. In particular, this chapter looks at the way in which individual's identities, as positioned within the category of 'artist', are reproduced, maintained and managed through their interactions with others in the conduct of their work activities and events, particularly in relation to the example of the art exhibition. A key factor that forms the framework for this discussion is in exploring the development and maintenance of the artist's social legitimacy within, and external to, the art worlds in which they operate. Social legitimacy in this context refers to the way in which the individual artist is viewed, and views themselves, as having the professional and social status and attributes that are considered to be essential for them to have a right to call themselves a competent and successful member of the artistic profession and the art world. While the notion of professional legitimacy was not something that was explicitly articulated very often in the conversations I had with artists, it was an idea that was expressed in a range of other ways that clearly demonstrated the importance of attaining and maintaining legitimacy as a means to achieving success within the art world. The ways in which this notion was expressed included discussions around the significance of maintaining particular relationships, demonstrating creative and technical prowess, successfully showing and selling work, having positive external assessments of their work, and achieving financial benefit through sales, public funding or sponsorship. In all of these discussions it was clear that the artists' engagement with the social world was key to their success in these endeavours, and in this capacity, there were a number of ways in which the artists I worked with engaged with their wider social world, in order to support the development and maintenance of artistic legitimacy. The range of relationships that had the potential to contribute to the artist's legitimate status included their relationships with other artists, with gallery owners, arts organisations and funding bodies, and with their audience, customers or patrons. As would be expected these relationships played out somewhat differently depending on the individual artist and their situation, but in all the engagement that was undertaken, there were a number of similar

performative elements that were evident, and which appeared to have a direct impact on the artist's, and others, view of their capacities and position within that social world.

This chapter, therefore, provides a discussion of the way in which the social relationships of the artists I worked with played a role in the formation and maintenance of their professional legitimacy, and how that social status was performed and presented within the critical context of their relations with the various members of the art world. Working within this context I explore the notion of the legitimate artist through explicating the range of key social relations associated with a particular event, the art exhibition, as an exemplar that supports the development of an holistic picture of the ways in which this important mark of their creative identities was produced and maintained. In this capacity this chapter provides a focus on the social relations that are played out at an exhibition, and characterises them as being multifaceted and complex, with the artist playing the central role of the skilled, creative and knowledgeable host, as understood within the framework of the standards of the art world. I argue that a key element to the success of this performance project, and therefore the legitimacy of the practitioner, is to have been perceived to be a successful exhibition 'host', as it is understood within the parameters of the well established rules for hosting such events. Three indicators for success in this capacity include: 1. drawing the right crowd, 2. creating and projecting the right artistic and creative image and environment and, 3. demonstrating success at generating sales and positive critical evaluation. These three key indicators, therefore, are also explored and addressed as a central focus of this chapter with the aim of further contextualising and unpacking the importance of the artist's social relations to the work they do. The subsequent discussion and exploration of the making and maintaining of an artist's social legitimacy, which draws primarily from data obtained through my fieldwork, follows a logical progression which begins with a discussion of the concept of legitimacy, an outline of the history and culture of art exhibitions, and then follows with a description and interpretations of the planning, conduct and conclusion of an exhibition, with a focus on unpacking the social relationships that are central to the exhibition processes. Throughout the chapter I make use of one primary example - Ann's *Anticipation #2* exhibition, in addition to a number of secondary ethnographic examples relating to my informants' exhibition activities. As discussed in Chapter Six of this thesis, Ann's *Anticipation 2* exhibition was held about a year after her *Anticipation* exhibition, in the same suburban gallery venue as *Anticipation*, and incorporated a number of the artworks that did not make it into the first exhibition, as well as presenting a range of new pieces.

7.2. LEGITIMACY AS A SOCIAL IMPERATIVE

The requirement to attain and maintain social legitimacy presents a strong imperative for organisations and individuals in all societies. The term legitimacy derives originally from a framework of understanding regarding the lineage or marital status of an individual, the nature of which confers legitimacy (or illegitimacy) upon them within a domestic or political arena, and which then may have an impact on the social status or privileges bestowed upon those social actors (Bell, 1997:237). The current understanding of the term legitimacy still encompasses this meaning and also extends further to denote an individual's, or organisation's, belonging, authenticity, competence and respectability within a social setting, which may be seen to be inherent or earned, or both. The granting of legitimacy upon a social actor, the process of legitimation, still ensures that those with this status have access to power, rights and privileges that other 'non-legitimate' individuals may not be entitled to. Consider, for example, the case of royalty where the power to rule and other privileges, are conferred exclusively upon individuals on the basis of their familial relations and lineage, a process that is highly formalised and subject to a framework of rules, but is also subject to resistance, challenge and constant re-presentation within changing social contexts²¹.

The studies undertaken in the area of legitimacy and legitimation are prevalent within the disciplines of sociology and organisational management, with a particular focus on power and political economies (see Matcham 2014, Kosut 2013, Eshelman 2011, Koreinik 2011, Robinson 2009 and Salter & Jones 2005) and professions and labour studies (see Rajak 2014, Bitektine 2011, Mcnamara 2009 and Aurini 2006). The field of anthropology contributes to these areas (Jauregui 2014, Jusionyte 2013, Lê 2013, McCann et al 2013 and Swartz 2013), as well as to a range of other specific social and cultural fields such as power (Alonso & Fidalgo 2014, Rajak 2014, Babül 2012, Dent 2012 and Dyal 2012) and identity (Cru 2015, Madsen 2014, Jusionyte 2013, Kosut 2013, McElhinny 2010, Bainton 2008 and Jing 2008).

Legitimacy only matters in the context of social relations as it is a state of being that is reliant on the perceptions, and attendant actions, of other social actors operating within the

²¹ For example, see Belli 2011 for a discussion of the ways in which the construction and appropriation of art and architecture play a role in legitimising familial claims to power

context of a set framework of social ideals and hierarchies. The legitimate individual or entity is one that is seen to be legitimate by others through their ability to demonstrate that legitimacy through their achievement of specific social ideals or rules. The payoff for social legitimacy is evidenced through the kinds of benefits and privileges that those conferred with the status can access, including benefits of a social, financial and economic nature. In order to achieve the social esteem and benefits associated with being legitimate, individuals and groups can expend significant resources and time in developing and maintaining their own social legitimacy through engaging in meaningful relations and activities with other social actors. For example, Rajak (2014) discusses the corporate mythologising that is undertaken by the multinational corporation Anglo-American in order to create a history and tradition for itself that is in alignment with wider social understandings of self made fortunes as being good, and with that of the country in which it operates, thereby legitimising its operations as being the work of a legitimate local company. This includes appropriating history and notions of modernity that are seen to be relevant to the South African collective identity in order to construct themselves as moral and worthy corporate entities (Rajak 2014).

Legitimacy is recognised and exercised on a broad range of levels, from the global or national level (see for example Población & Fidalgo 2014, Rajak 2014, Babül, 2012, Dent 2012 and Dyal 2012) to the banal everyday management of an individual's social world (see for example Cru 2015, Stanfield & Corbin 2012, Humphreys 2010, Lippmann 2010, Phillips 2010, McNamara 2009 and Bell 1997). The key aligning factor across the scale and scope of all legitimacy and legitimating practices, frameworks and traditions is the focus on, and perceptions of, the external evaluation of social actors, which is always a key factor in its development and maintenance, and applies equally to the perception of the legitimacy of governments, organisations or individuals.

In the art world, the production and maintenance of legitimacy is developed and maintained through the fostering of networks and relationships with legitimate organisations and individuals that are part of, or have an invested interest in, the art world. The production and maintenance of legitimacy can be viewed as an active process that artists continuously work to achieve, but something that is also highly supported in the well established framework of practices and knowledge within the art world. The way in which this occurs includes: through producing and maintaining legitimacy through public performance and social engagement, through the fostering of networks and relationships with desirable

organisations and individuals and, through the display and sharing of discrete knowledge and experience with other skilled peers, or as a teacher/mentor for those still developing in the discipline. The activities and work undertaken in this context allows the legitimately sanctioned artist to hold a special social role in which their products, discourse and activities support the production, reproduction (and sometimes contestation) of the art world's, and wider society's, normalised practices and values (as discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis). The deeply conditioned shared beliefs and understandings of the, ostensibly inherent, nature of people and societies are underpinned and supported by the shared practices and institutions with which artists engage as both agents and subjects. It is these shared practices and institutions that provide the structure which underpins the concept of legitimacy in the art world, through presenting strong models and ideals that are interpreted and emulated, and which ensures the continuity of the social form over time. This culture of practice and belief has been described in reference to various social concepts, and within a range of geographical and cultural settings, including those related to western social and class structures associated with cultural production (Halle 1994 and Bourdieu 1993), in relation to the social significance of high art markets and economies (Plattner 1996, Morphy 1995 and Becker 1984) and in relation to the production and utilisation of art as a social agent (Myers 2004 and Gell 1998).

7.3. ART EXHIBITIONS AND SOCIAL MEANING

The social interactions and relationships in which the artists I worked with engaged, were diverse and were seen by the artists as playing a role in supporting the development of their legitimacy as artists, their maintenance of integrated artistic identities, and in supporting their future professional direction and prospects. The key relationships that were evident during the course of my fieldwork included: friendships and collaborations with other artists, relations enacted whilst preparing for, participating in, or visiting, an exhibition, involvement in professional arts advocacy organisations (often on a voluntary basis), liaising and negotiating with galleries and funding bodies, engaging with educational institutions, and, participating in online forums in a range of capacities. While there was a noted difference in the level of formality exhibited by my informants when engaging in some social arenas as opposed to others, and the varying contexts of the engagement usually dictated the form of the conversations or input undertaken by the artist, there was a quite consistent element of the performance of the legitimate self as artist, which was displayed across the interactions. This public performance of themselves as artists, and the consequent forms of social recognition that stem from that, is what constitutes the

remainder of the chapter, in which I focus on the art exhibition. The exhibition is an event that is central to the way in which artists show themselves to the world, and at which they are able to foster and define their relationships with other key individuals, and to situate (or resituate) themselves within the established social and hierarchical structure of the art world.

It's important for me to keep exhibiting as much as possible so that I don't end up being forgotten or missing out on any of the opportunities that come along when you have a good public profile. If I lose contact with galleries and other artists, or stop applying for funding, then I am in danger of losing my place to someone else who is doing better at networking. It's hard work because there is a lot of time spent contacting people, doing coffees, filling out submissions...and making the new work that I will show. It's necessary, though, if I want to keep my profile as an artist going...Not only that, but it's also really important to show up to other people's exhibitions as well. I remember years ago when I first went to art school, the teacher asked me what exhibitions I had been to lately. That was the first time I heard the question but I have heard it (or versions) so many times since then. Going to exhibitions, especially openings, shows that you are still engaged in the whole thing and that you are willing to support other artists...it also ensures they feel more obliged to come to my next exhibition [he smiles].

(Howe-Piening 2008)

Barry's comments provide a brief introduction into the importance he attaches to ensuring he maintains social recognition as an established and successful artist. This kind of positive social recognition was demonstrated to have a number of impacts for the artists I worked with, including enhancing their likelihood of increased earnings from their work, providing more opportunities for collaboration, funding or influence, and ensuring the maintenance or enhancement of their perceived acceptance and esteem within their specific social world (and also in some cases, the wider social world). One of the key ways in which the artists I worked with developed and maintained their public profiles was through the vehicle of the public art exhibition. These kinds of public events, in which the artist plays a key role, provide a forum to display the skill and creativity of the artist as active member of the wider art world. They also operate as a way to support other art world agents, such as the artist's sponsors, peers and colleagues, as well as a wider audience of art enthusiasts or patrons.

Public art exhibitions had their beginnings in Europe with the Paris Salon from 1737 (Jordon 2001), followed by the Royal Academy in London from 1769 (Clarke & Clarke 2010). Previous to the inception of the Salons, art making operated primarily on a patron system and it was, therefore, rare for art, particularly disciplines such as painting, to be exhibited in public places. The primary exception to this was in the case of churches and

public sculptures, which had more explicit moral, spiritual and commemorative purposes behind their display (Parsons & Hornik 2006: 355-357). While it is unlikely that the new exhibition system attracted significant numbers of people from across the social spectrum, it did provide the opportunity, and an enduring model, for artists themselves to develop a more peer based system for the evaluation and innovation of art, and to contest mainstream aesthetic and stylistic standards. This was particularly evident in developments such as the Salon de Refuses exhibitions that provided artists with a forum to strongly resist the aesthetic status quo of the nineteenth century Paris art world (Wilson-Bareau 2007: 309-319). This was still tempered, however, by the fact that artists rarely had the financial means to support themselves without selling to wealthy patrons (or being wealthy themselves). This meant that there was likely a natural limit on the impact of such developments in art innovation until the developing social conditions saw the inception and growth of publicly based financial support for the arts which, accompanied by the increasing democratisation of 'high culture' (Evrard 1997:167-175) and the implementation of public policy pronouncing the social benefit of the arts for all, provided a level of freedom for artists to explore and innovate their mediums with more depth.²²

Perhaps as a testament to its enduring connection to the institutional expression of elite forms of economic, social and cultural capital, and despite the continuing belief in the democratisation of the arts within western societies, the overall format and style of the western art exhibition has not changed appreciably since its inception, and continues to demonstrate an established relationship with the way in which other museum and curio exhibits, as forms of elite knowledge, are constructed in the western imperialist style (see, for example, Dahl & Stade 2000, Alberti 2006, Durand 2010, Marcus 2010, Sabeti 2015). The way in which the spaces are configured, the objects arranged, and the activities undertaken within the event are scheduled, can be seen to have a considerable consistency across time and in all geographic locations that have been touched by the western system of science and art. The connection between notions of civilisation, cultural capital, and the role of art in western society, is a consistent one in which the art exhibition has become an

²² Notwithstanding the appointment of Michael Massey Robinson to the quasi publicly funded position of NSW Poet Laureate in 1810, a position that attracted a payment of two cows (Clarke 1967), the public funding of the arts, more generally, started to occur in Australia in the early 1900's with the opening of the two National Art Galleries in Sydney and Melbourne (Throsby 2001). Since then the mix of public and private funding of the arts, and of art exhibiting has continued to grow into a strong and established part of our mainstream society, and has incorporated a range of funding modalities for both organisations and individuals (Australia Council for the Arts 2015: 38).

enduring ritual that is highly symbolic of a society's social character and values. This can be seen in the local context of South Australia, whose colonial history reveals that not long after the declaration of the colony in 1834, discussions of fine arts were a part of the public discourse, and art exhibitions were already taking place. (SA Gazette and Colonial Register 1845)²³

The art exhibition continues to play a key role in the work and social life of artists. The importance of this event was regularly expressed and exemplified during my fieldwork, and its wider social impact, as expressed by participants and observers, was discussed as having a culturally elevating quality to symbolically support or contest social ideals or models. Exhibitions provide an essential forum for the development and maintenance of a broad range of relationships and networks that support the artist's identity and status, both within and outside of the art world. When viewed in terms of their most fundamental and practical application, exhibitions are a forum for an artist to display their artworks with the aim of making sales to art collectors, organisations, colleagues or members of the public. This purpose of earning an income from an exhibition is an important and central aspect of the function of this public event but, as discussed, the exhibition also has a key function as a forum in which the artist's networks and relationships are displayed, their professional skill, social position and status is performed, and the values and norms of the art world, and the

²³ These exhibitions played a key role in establishing and maintaining the identity of the small city, and its leading members, in terms of their social aspirations that strongly identified with higher human values, such as is explicitly described in the following excerpts:

The Exhibition of the Society of Arts is undoubtedly a gratifying index to the civilization of the South Australian community. It affords this index in two ways - first, by the feat it brings to light of the possession by our fellow colonists of a large number of really good pictures and other creations of artistic genius, and secondly by the further fact that it has established, viz., that the non-possessing portion of the community will not only flock in crowds to visit the collection, but will also remain for hours to study its contents. Here are between 300 and 400 pictures collected in a short time, without little effort and yet forming an aggregation which surprises all beholders...The second fact to which we referred is the concourse of spectators which the Exhibition has attracted. Paring the past week it has been visited by more than 1,100 persons of all ranks, from His Excellency the Governor downwards, and of almost all ages. Childhood has been taken there to have its opening tastes stimulated and guided. Youth has been there to correct it's wild fancies and to regulate its exuberant tendencies by the examples of cultivated skill. The mechanic has been there to prove that the labour of the land does not unfit him for the enjoyment of the beautiful and the tradesman has been there, testifying that the busy pursuits of commercial life cannot wean him from the love of art. In fact, it has been proved that throughout our community there exists an appreciation of the refined pleasures derivable from this department of intellectual culture which we have, not hitherto, gained credit for. The Exhibition is not merely an index to our existing condition, it is also a powerful means of improving and elevating our social character.(South Australian Register 1858)

wider society, are reproduced and re-presented. The central agent in this public event is the exhibiting artist, or artists, who work in concert with a range of social players that operate to support and anchor the artist as a legitimate and valued member of this social world. Artists also work to support these other social players in staking their own important claim to a position within the art world, as specialist and role-specific participants, by their presence at, and interaction within, art world events such as art exhibitions. These other individuals play a key role, as Bourdieu asserts, in 'creating the authority with which the authors authorise' whilst directing 'attention to the *apparent producer*, the painter, writer or composer' (Bourdieu 1993: 76). Within this context, viewing the organisation, conduct and review of an art exhibition against the central social and cultural values, beliefs, structures, hierarchies and norms of the society and sub-culture in which they are conducted, can reveal a picture of the event as a social and cultural project, as much as it is an individual project.

There are a range of processes associated with the preparation and conduct of an art exhibition that can be said to be consistent and broadly replicable, which became apparent during the course of my fieldwork and discussions with the artists I worked with. The form of an exhibition usually has a predictable sequence of events, that are supported by various rituals and symbolic devices, which are performed in a public space that is generally considered to be democratic and non-exclusionary. This may, however, not be the case in practice given the nature of art and its unique 'high culture' position in the social world. For example, there are a number of texts that explicate the discrete and exclusionary nature of the production and distribution of art, and the social machinations of the art world, such as Becker (1984), Bourdieu (1984,1993) and Gell (1998), for example. The art exhibition is a public event that can be seen to be a social device that is routinely utilised by art world agents, and which plays a key role in performing the ideals and values of the art world in similar ways in which all other public events can be seen to be representative or reflective of the social worlds from which they are constructed (Handelman 1990). This normalisation of art world social ideals and practices is something that is strongly seen to be mediated through the artists as the central 'player' within the event. In recording and examining the socially active and interconnecting art world relations that play out during the exhibition process, however, it can be demonstrated that within the context of the art exhibition the individual project of the artist is strongly supported by the other participants within that social framework, and this concept forms the basis for my discussions in this chapter.

The social support network conferred by other art world agents provides a platform for the performance of the artist's legitimacy, which is apparently centred around their developed skill and discipline, but which is also understood to be underpinned by their possession of inherent talent, creativity and charisma. This can be considered to be the 'magical' combination of attributes that are essential for the creation of a successful artist, and one that is considered to be critical to their sanctioning as legitimate artists in the eyes of their social networks.

7.4. HOSTING A SUCCESSFUL EXHIBITION

In order to develop the platform for this performativity to occur, the artist must first engage themselves in planning the event, which usually begins with the sourcing of exhibition spaces and opportunities. The range of potential exhibition spaces that are available to artists includes community spaces dedicated to providing not-for-profit spaces for the showing of art, galleries that run on a commercial basis, businesses of other types that provide additional space for artists to show their work (such as cafes or bars), or private spaces that are individually or collectively run by artists themselves, where they might also have studio spaces for the making of art. The majority of the artists I worked with made use of a range of these different types of spaces, with the community based exhibition spaces being the most common. Only one of my informants, Ron, had an exclusive relationship with a gallery, which required him to exhibit at least once a year, and which also guaranteed him access to pre-interested buyers (many of whom were collectors of his work).

The sourcing of exhibition spaces is achieved in a number of ways, including through public application processes, or through the utilisation of existing relationships and networks with the providers of exhibition space, or with other artists or funding bodies who may provide content or funding support for the conduct of an exhibition. Organisations that provide exhibition space generally also employ gallery coordinators and publish mailing lists so that artists can access the information regarding space availability and artist eligibility requirements. The artists I worked with usually tried to exhibit in a space at least once or twice a year, and this frequency provides a strong impetus for them to maintain networks with those organisations that could provide the facilities or resources required to realise their goals. Professionally speaking, the private gallery space was considered to be the most desirable kind of space to exhibit, as these businesses work to develop and

maintain a ready cohort of serious buyers and, therefore, the gallery could be very selective about the artists they chose to work with.

As previously mentioned, a gallery may develop an exclusive relationship with an artist, but may also choose to offer an artist an ad-hoc exhibition which may be a tester for the potential commercial success of the work they are producing. For example, during the time I worked with Ann, she had three exhibitions, two of which were her 'Anticipation' exhibitions that were conducted at a local council owned gallery with which Ann had had a long relationship, including as an artist in residence in the 1980's. The other exhibition, 'Leopard' was her first at a private gallery located in the more well off eastern suburbs of Adelaide. The gallery at which the 'Anticipations' were shown is a popular and well established gallery in Ann's home area in the inner northern suburbs of Adelaide. Her suburb developed a reputation as an arts hub from the 1970's onwards, largely because of Ann's influence in the area, including in relation to her locally well known painted 'stobie' poles (Figure 16) initiative, which she began as a community arts project in 1983, and which other artists continue today under the administration of the local council (Prospect Council 2016).



Figure 16. Painted Stobie Poles
Prospect Council 2016

Galleries generally have a standard set of eligibility criteria upon which they choose artists for exhibition. The gallery in which Ann's Anticipation exhibitions were held has this outlined as a part of their application process, which stipulates that the artist and the proposed exhibition must possess the following attributes:

- of innovative artwork and events in any media, inclusive of visual, sound, installation and performance,
- in which the audience experience is considered,
- of new work that has not been exhibited in Adelaide metropolitan area,
- in both solo exhibitions or small scale group exhibitions by emerging and mid-career artists.

(Prospect Council, 2016)

In reference to the last criteria, Ann could be considered to be a late career artist, but her special relationship with the gallery, which goes back to the 1980's during her time as an Artist in Residence, is such that she is provided with opportunities that include specific invitations to exhibit. With the exception of such special arrangements, the process for organising an exhibit differs somewhat between venues, but generally speaking exhibitions are initiated through filling out a standard application form for community venues, and through making personal contact with a gallery representative in the private gallery system. Evaluations are made on a kind of merit in both cases, which includes evaluating the artist's history, qualifications, previous artworks and exhibitions, awards, critiques, and future concept plans. The community based gallery makes these assessments primarily on the submissions provided, whereas the private gallery evaluates the artist in person, which one could consider to be a more subjective process in which an artist's personality and appeal could also be evaluated. Rick described an interview with a gallery he had in which he was hoping to gain a place for a solo exhibition:

I had made a lot of approaches to galleries in a sort of random fashion to begin with...sent out a bunch of emails with my details and some images of my work. Quite a few wrote back to say that they were full for the year and to contact later, or that my work didn't suit their criteria in some way. One gallery got back to me and we made a time for a meeting. They wanted me to bring in a portfolio of photos of my work, which I put together in the days before the meeting. It was actually a great process for giving me a good overview of all the stuff I have done to date. The meeting itself was pretty informal and quick. The gallery was quite small and it was empty when I got there because it was the middle of the week. The guy I came to see greeted me and then we just stood together at the reception desk while he looked through my portfolio and asked me questions about my work and my history. The meeting was interesting because the guy seemed as interested in my 'pedigree' as he was in my work. He asked me about my art education and what other artists I had worked with, which I thought were interesting questions because they didn't have much at all to do with my current work or what I would be exhibiting. When I mentioned a couple of other artists I had worked with, he knew one of them and commented that he liked their work. I had the feeling this was a good outcome for me since we found a bit of common ground to work from. Anyway, in the end he said to me that they have a number of shared exhibitions over the year and asked if I would be interested in joining one of those, which I was...and did do eventually.

Rick's experience illustrates the importance of being able to demonstrate legitimacy as a means to facilitating successful outcomes in the art world. This was characterised by the questions he was asked regarding his connections, education and previous exhibition history. The meeting process he went through, in that capacity, was more than just an objective assessment of the merits of his artwork, it was a social assessment of his place in the local art scene.

Many artists also seek funding support to hold exhibitions, which is available from a number of sources such as state and national public arts funding organisations (such as Arts SA 2016 and Australia Council for the Arts 2016). Application processes for funding is based on the artist providing a funding submission that contains much of the same kind of information that would be found in an exhibition space application. There is usually a set of discrete criteria that the artist must address in terms of meeting the current eligibility focus of the organisation at the time of the application. This varies but is often articulated in terms of an expectation that the artworks will have positive social, professional and creative outcomes.²⁴

Funding for exhibitions can, depending on the criteria for the particular grant, be used for providing an income for the artist during the making process, the hiring of a venue, printing of brochures and price lists, framing and other presentation requirements for artwork, and for the catering provided on the opening night. While it was common for the artists I worked with to try and attain some funding for putting on an exhibition, they all agreed that the receipt of funding was considered to be a bonus rather than a deciding factor as to

²⁴ For example, the Arts SA eligibility for independent makers and presenters grants states that the proposed project must demonstrate:

- Artistic merit, quality, innovation & originality, including the ability of the artist and the project to contribute to the development of their artform by embracing innovation and originality, and the ability of the artist to meet the artistic challenge of the project,
- Audience development, including an impact on growing audiences or the audience's critical understanding of the artform,
- Community participation, including an impact on access, social inclusion, cultural diversity and artistic benefit to the community. The project's contribution to broadening the range of people participating in, and experiencing, the arts by providing more varied and greater access,
- Cultural leadership, including an impact on South Australia's reputation as a centre of cultural leadership and the resultant economic benefits,
- Professional development, including an impact on enhancing the professional reputation of artists and advancement of their careers. (Arts SA 2016)

whether an exhibition would take place. This is because the funding dollars available to artists do not meet the demand for funding, so artists generally start with the assumption that their applications will not be successful. This was echoed in the perspectives discussed by my informants, such as Christina, who said that she always applies for any funding or contracts she may be eligible for with the expectation that she will likely not be successful. She continued on to say that if she is successful (she has won a few funding opportunities), that is really beneficial financially, but she also attempts to find other benefit in the application process in terms of developing a clearer understanding of her project concept and its meaning and purpose within the wider artistic and social context.

The relationships that are developed and utilised during the initiation phases of an exhibition are usually continued during the preparation and conduct of the event. After a successful booking has been made, and funding secured, the artist's initial concept for the exhibition is brought to fruition through the making of the artworks, a process that is discussed in detail in previous chapters of this thesis, particularly Chapters 4 and 6. Once the artworks are ready for exhibition, the ordering of the physical space within the venue becomes a key focus, and one which can, later, be viewed as an indicator of the success, or not, of the event and the artist as event host.

The conscious structuring of that space during the preparation phases of the exhibition is an important factor, which speaks to the strong traditions that guide the organisation of spaces for the exhibition of material artefacts. In this capacity, there is a predictable style and form for the exhibition of artworks, which appears to be completely natural and logical and which is, ostensibly, based on an intuitive aesthetic understanding of the way in which objects look best when organised in particular space. This was something that was clearly demonstrated in the setup processes I observed on a number of occasions, during which the importance of achieving the right configuration for the exhibition of the artworks was highlighted through both the considerable time and thoughtful dedication devoted to the process. A description of a typical process follows:

after spending considerable time wrapping and packing the objects into the two cars, we made our way to the gallery at about 11am [on the morning before the exhibition's evening opening]. The entry to the exhibition space was through a number of public spaces, including a public library, and we carried all the (many) works through this area to the gallery located at the rear of the building. Once the works were all carefully situated in the middle of the first room, I accompanied Ann while she walked around the space and talked about where she thought things might go. Ann had a mixture of paintings and small sculptural objects that she was going to be exhibiting in the show and the gallery was furnished with a range of

infrastructure, such as a moveable wall hanging system, and plinths/stands of various sizes and heights, which were free to be used by the exhibiting artist/s. I asked Ann what she thinks about when she is deciding where to place her objects and she responded that it was a combination of wanting to achieve a 'logical narrative' whilst ensuring that the works 'looked good with one another'. Ann had already grouped a number of the objects together in 'family' groups and so these were destined to be exhibited in the same vicinity as one another. We focused on hanging all the paintings and drawings first...a long job that required a lot of trying and testing of pieces together until the right combination and narrative was found. As we worked together I enquired about what she meant by logical narrative, as I had in my head an idea of a story that has a beginning and an end but struggled to see how such a disparate group of objects could be speaking to their audience in that way. It was difficult for Ann to answer this question in a clear way, other than to say that she didn't expect the audience to read the exhibition like a book, but the 'story' of making the artworks was something that she had experienced and she knew how all the pieces fitted together.

(Howe-Piening 2007)

This particular exhibition had been somewhat of a struggle for Ann, who had decided to hold it after having been offered, unsolicited, an exhibition space at the same local art gallery as her recent successful exhibition 'Anticipation'. Ann had a lot of leftover pieces that did not make it into the original exhibition, and along with a number of other artworks she had made subsequently, she chose to bring them all together in this latest exhibition. This meant that her current exhibition did not have as much of a cohesive thematic character to it as her previous one, which was characterised by the representation of renewal and nurturing symbols such as the egg, hand, pod and phoenix (see Chapter Six of this thesis). To Ann, however, this current exhibition was the continuation of her personal story told in a public forum, and as such, she had an innate (and somewhat inexpressible) understanding of the chronology of things, which also took into account the way in which she anticipated that the show would be viewed by her audience as 'a chance to experience my life by going on a walk through my things'. (Howe-Piening 2007)

Ann's placement of the objects also demonstrated a very traditional format in terms of its alignment with other events of that type. The hanging of paintings on the wall, and the placing of other objects on plinths, is a form of exhibiting artefacts that is familiar to those who have visited western museums or art galleries. The conscious placement of objects within the exhibition space encourages a particularly specific way of moving around the space, and creates the environment for reflective and fluid movement around the objects, in what could be said to be a narrative form.

While there is a strong body of work within the field of design and aesthetics that is concerned with articulating the framework and rules for designing contemporary

exhibitions (see Bogle 2013), none of the artists I worked with had undertaken any formal studies in this area, but rather were drawing upon their own sense of what worked for their objects within the space. This sense relied upon what they already knew about art exhibitions from an experiential point of view, which was then individualised through the filter of their specific understanding of the nature and meaning of the unique artworks they had produced. In discussing the construction of her solo jewellery exhibition in a small commercial gallery space, Fiona talked about drawing her basic understanding of what an exhibition should look like from her experience in visiting museums and galleries throughout her life. She described the feeling of just 'knowing' what an exhibition should look and feel like. Following on from that basic underpinning of knowledge, Fiona went on to describe her approach to the placing of the art objects in an exhibition space, which she said was about 'organising the objects to give each piece its own portion of space in a way that they can be individually appreciated by my audience...but also to ensure that they maintain a relationship with the other pieces I have in the exhibition'. (Howe-Piening 2007)

It is clear from my discussions with my informants, that museums and galleries, as ubiquitous institutions within western society, form an important model that guides and structures the choice and display of important cultural objects. Bourdieu refers to the gallery as the 'civic temples in which bourgeois society deposits its most sacred possessions...[and] everything combines to indicate that the world of art is as contrary to the world of everyday life as the sacred is to the profane.' (Bourdieu 1994:236). The art exhibitions that I attended, and that happen as a routine part of the Australian art world, have the sense of bridging the world of the everyday to the more rarefied world of the art museums that Bourdieu discusses. The form of the local art exhibitions, however, appears to be a modified mirror of that 'sacred' art museum structure, given that its basic format is something that is regularly reproduced in the art exhibitions I have attended. A key impact of that structure is in the guidance that it provides to the audience in fulfilling their prescribed social role, as reflective viewer of the objects, during the exhibition proceedings. The way in which the viewer is compelled to circumnavigate the space and reflect on the objects is, in part, a way in which the cultural authority of the artist and the art world can be asserted. Bourdieu describes the attendees at art museums as 'the chosen few who come to nurture a faith of virtuosi...[or] conformists and devotees who come to perform a class ritual...[which] calls for particular dispositions or predispositions, and brings in return its consecration of those who satisfy its demands, to the small elite who are self-chosen by their aptitude to respond to its appeal.' (Ibid4: 237) These 'self-chosen' art devotees that

Bourdieu describes form an essential part of the art exhibition experience, and it is with the audience in mind, including those with discrete artistic knowledge, that the spatial organisation of the exhibition is considered.

In this capacity, the exhibition space, which is also supported by resources such as the exhibition pamphlets and artwork 'blurbs', demands that the viewer take an active support role in the appreciation of the artworks. These activities also provide a forum for the audience members to perform their own knowledge of art appreciation and the art world, which thereby contributes to their own identity projects. Furthermore, the conformance to the standards of spatial use by artists supports the legitimacy of the artist through confirming their capacity to create a space that facilitates the appropriate response from visitors. Christina says:

The exhibition takes people on a bit of a journey, which is why I like to spend a fair bit of time making a space that speaks to people...if the way I have organised it makes sense to me, and I get a reaction from it, then it's probably going to feel the same for anyone coming along as well...I get a sense of achievement when I see people appreciating the space that I have made...it's really a nice feeling when they 'get' where I am coming from because it means that I have been successful in telling my story through the art and the space

(Howe-Piening 2007)

An exhibition usually shows for between two weeks and a month, during which time members of the public can visit the gallery at any time the gallery is open to view the works. The exhibition also always has an opening event, and it is during this time that a broad range of the social relationships of the artist are on show, and where the artistic legitimacy of the artist/s, and the traditional norms and values of the art world, are performed. A way to perform this legitimacy publicly is for the artist to demonstrate that they know lots of other legitimate artists, and other relevant legitimate members of the art world, and to show that they are able to attract these desirable people to an exhibition.

The artists I worked with concurred with this assertion in that they consider it critical to get a 'good crowd' at an opening. In terms of what constitutes a good crowd, there was general consensus amongst my informants that there should be an adequate overall number of people in terms of the holding capacity of the venue. Further to that, the number of heads should ideally be made up of: other artists who are usually personally known to the exhibiting artist, one or more public figures, such as art theorists, senior bureaucrats, politicians or minor celebrities, other friends and family of the artist and, art enthusiasts or

potential buyers. In order to achieve this ideal mix it is important for artists to have a desire and capacity to maintain a wide range of contacts with the people that are seen as being other legitimate members of the art world. To some degree this happens quite naturally during the course of their professional development and work. For example, there is a natural tendency for artists to have other artists as friends. As discussed previously, artists who were trained within a tertiary arts education setting tend to develop a range of relationships with other novice artists, a number of which would continue on after they had completed their studies²⁵.

The development of relationships with other artists, arts administrators and gallery owners or representatives also happens during the course of professional collaborations (such as when undertaking joint exhibitions, public artworks, committee work and the like), or through being inducted into the extended relationships of existing social connections. With this in mind, one important key indicator of a successful exhibition, in terms of the people who attend, is in who comes along to present the opening address, which is a tradition that is performed at the official start of all art exhibitions. This speech is always given by someone who has a reputation as being knowledgeable in the art world in some capacity, usually either as practitioner, commentator or researcher. It is assumed that the more successful you are as an artist, the more impressive your speaker will be. For example, as Ann has a long standing and well developed reputation as a skilled artist, art teacher and arts advocate, she was able to attract a well respected academic in the field of visual arts as her speaker. Ann's speaker was someone that she had a personal affiliation with through her large network of contacts, as well as being an individual who has strong professional legitimacy in the arts through his experience in undertaking extensive research and writing in the field of visual arts and philosophy.

The speaker is someone who represents the artist, but also represents themselves, at the art exhibition. The presenting of speeches at art exhibitions can be seen to be one of the ways in which a speaker also ensures their membership of the art world through performing their own expertise and knowledge in a public forum and with the approval of their peers. The speaker, therefore, provides accolades and status to the artist, and also receives these same benefits for their efforts. The opening speech is most often composed by the speaker, and it is traditionally expected to provide a background and context for the exhibition. This

²⁵ See Chapter Four: Doing Art

includes introducing the artist, discussing the theme and providing an assessment of the works within the context of the theme, or in terms of the wider body of work produced by the artist or within the field. There is a familiar way in which the opening speech transpires, which is generally well demonstrated by the following description of the beginning of Ann's opening address:

Ann had introduced me to her speaker, John, as he arrived about 30 minutes before the opening speech. As they had not been in contact to discuss the contents of his speech since he agreed to open the exhibition, he confirmed with Ann how long the speech would go for and complimented her on the artworks, which he was seeing physically for the first time (having previously only been provided with images to inform the development of his speech). The tone of the conversation between John and Ann was friendly, informal and mutually complimentary, with Ann expressing her gratitude for his generosity in lending his expertise to her exhibition. John, Ann and the gallery manager then moved to the small raised podium that had been set up for the speech and Ann started to gently tap her glass with a pen whilst calling for the attention of the people in the gallery. Everyone in the gallery then started to move into position, forming a semi-circle around the podium. Almost all of the audience members had a glass in their hand, whilst some who didn't have one, collected a glass from the drinks table before taking up a position in the audience. Once Ann was sure everyone was assembled and listening, she thanked everyone for coming, thanked the gallery for hosting and introduced her friend, John, who would be delivering the opening address. In this capacity, Ann described John's career history, the way in which they personally knew each other, and made comment on the esteem with which he is held in his professional discipline area. She then turned and kissed John on the cheek as they swapped places, she now standing behind, and to the side, of him. Once John was at the podium he thanked Ann for the invitation to speak and then, mirroring the character of Ann's introduction, he also described Ann's career and their personal connection before launching into his more focused content describing the content and theme of the exhibition.

(Howe-Piening 2007)

The way in which the social rules of behaviour and reciprocity plays out between the artist and the speaker also has its equivalents in the other relationships that are on display during the exhibition opening. For example, during the opening speech the audience generally maintained an interested and relaxed demeanour throughout the discussion, clapping or laughing as the social cues demanded. This way of engaging as an audience is typical within the context of the type of public address in which an expert in a field is given a platform to provide their opinion or interpretation on an issue (or an art exhibition in this case). The audience plays a key part in the structure of such events, which asserts and maintains a hierarchy of knowledge through the public confirmation of the addressee's high status.

John's speech, however, was marred by his misreading of the exhibition's theme of 'anticipation' as 'emancipation'. He, therefore, provided a lengthy address on the issue of emancipation from an artistic perspective, including drawing connections between Ann's

works and his discussion. As it became quickly apparent that a mistake had been made, this situation clearly presented some difficulty for the audience, which demonstrably experienced a collective shift in demeanour as a result of the uncertainty of the moment. This was expressed in a number of ways, starting with the initiation of whispered conversations between audience members known to one another. As the speech continued, connections were made between audience members who were not known to one another through the exchanging of knowing glances, or the whispering of short postulations expressing the awkwardness of the situation. The man standing next to me turned to look at me and, shaking his head, said quietly 'that's unbelievable'. I nodded in response (with what I assumed to be an empathetic look on my face). After a few (maybe five) minutes of this kind of response, the audience appeared to largely readjust itself and returned to its former demeanour of interested engagement with the speech. This appeared to be, however, more reserved than before and occasionally punctuated with murmurs of ongoing disbelief at specific subsequent parts of the speech that made reference to emancipation. The mistake made by John presented as a strangely liminal (Turner 1969: 94-113) space of time in which the deviation from the normal events created uncertainty that led to the audience engaging in behaviour, albeit subtly, that transgressed the behaviour considered appropriate for such an event. The feeling of camaraderie amongst the group appeared to be very high during this time, but diminished later as the 'natural' order of event resumed. The way in which the mistake made by the speaker affected the proceedings highlights the importance of the whole dynamic of the interactions in ensuring the successful conduct of the exhibition event. Each participant was required to play their prescribed role in accordance with the traditions that have been established within that specific art world social arena. It is interesting to note that Ann gave little sign that there was anything awry with the speech while it was being delivered. In this capacity she appeared to remain engaged with what was being said, and provided few clues that she was aware of the mistake, and after the speech was concluded she, once again, gave thanks to John for speaking. Ann's later clarified that she was disappointed that the mistake had been made but that she was sensitive to the awkwardness of the situation and didn't want to make it worse. She also expressed a strong desire not to alienate John as she was hoping to maintain a strong ongoing professional relationship with him, which may include requesting his support for future exhibitions.

Exhibition speakers like John assume an expert position within the art world, which ensures they enjoy a high level of professional legitimacy amongst their peers. Within this context,

therefore, the mistake made by John could not be too overtly criticised as there is the impression that his mistakes may reflect on the group as a whole and have the potential to diminish the idealised position of such high status individuals within the social hierarchy of the group. John's mistake, however, was not completely subsequently ignored by the exhibition group but, rather, was discussed and explored in the relative safety of more discrete social interactions, including with Ann, in which she was approached by a number of people who expressed dismay at the mistake and ensured her that they did not consider it reflected badly on the exhibition or the works. This kind of social interaction ensured that the social group maintained a sense of what is correct behaviour through the recounting of the details and impact of the problem, to articulate what they 'are not' in order to define what they should be.

The social interactions that are engaged with on the day are seen by the artists, and others, as having an extended impact beyond the discrete realm of the exhibition opening. In this capacity, analysing the factors around the people who turned up, and those who didn't, was the subject of some discussion and interest for Ann and she engaged in an informal post-exhibition evaluation. The factors that were of most interest were in enumerating the number of legitimate art world members as opposed to the number of art enthusiasts or patrons of a non-artistic background. Ann considered it important that there was a strong contingent of art world members, as this indicated to her that she had adequate status to bring appropriately knowledgeable people to the exhibition. Ann discussed the ways in which the nature of the attendees would impact on her future work and success, including through the development and maintenance of already existing relationships that would benefit her in terms of more access to artistic opportunities, the potential to meet new contacts, and through the personal validation she felt in having a strong cohort of friends who shared her interests and lifestyle. Additionally, Ann was aware of her role, and the role of her exhibition attendees, in the wider connected networks of the art world in Adelaide. Her attendees constituted part of an active continuum that, through their constant participation in artistic events such as exhibitions (either as artists or attendees), re-performed and represented the key ideals and values of the art world, whilst contributing to their own individual pursuits of artistic legitimacy.

The relationships that artists develop, and thereafter aim to maintain, as a part of the exhibition application process are predominantly considered to be a valuable element in supporting their professional goals as artists. However, the relationships can sometimes

also be seen to be problematic in cases where their importance takes precedence over the artistic work itself:

You can do all the slog yourself and still get to show your work around the place, but if you know people, have other friends who are artists, are on friendly terms with other people in the arts, then it's usually a bit easier to get in places. A lot of people start in group shows, either with a friendship group from art school, or in a more random group who then become friendly. When the relationships start to build, people tell you about opportunities, you discover connections between people, you can get 'insider' tips on how best to make applications....the benefits to having a wide ranging network of contacts is quite amazing. You can see that with some people who moved up quickly even though their work is just okay. They are usually the charismatic types who know lots of people. They trade on the relationships almost more than they focus on the art.

(Howe-Piening 2008)

This clear imperative to foster professional relationships on a range of levels was articulated as playing an important ongoing role in shaping and supporting my informants integrated professional and personal lives and success. The artistic 'gatekeepers' or influencers, that play an essential role in the development of an artist's career, operate from within a range of positions within the art world and their decisions or opinions can impact on the way in which resources or status are conferred within that space. While there is not always consistency of opinion or favour within the spheres of authority and influence across the art world, the artists I worked with generally expressed the opinion that being known widely, and being recognised as an active participant and supporter of the art world and its events and members, was a significant factor in being able to successfully gain access to some of those resources. In the case of the exhibition, social engagement was seen as being a central component of the event, and the character and success of the exhibition was seen to be highly dependent on the nature of all the social relationships and interactions that occurred within that sphere.

The public legitimacy of the artist, while highly dependent on the attendance and approval of desirable attendees at exhibitions, is also dependent on external validation gained through the sales of artwork and positive reviews. The sale of artworks during an exhibition is considered to be an important factor in determining a particular kind of legitimacy for the artist, and is both a public, as well as a personal (to the artist), indicator of artistic success. This success and legitimacy is based on the commercial success that is deemed important for the artist in a number of ways. This includes the status attached to the general desirability, or perception of worth (as investment or status symbol) of the artworks, and in

terms of the potential of commercial success to allow artists the freedom to give up all other kinds of work and just focus on their art full time - an outcome that was considered to be ideal for all the artists I worked with. During Ann's exhibition opening, there were discussions with Ann, and amongst the attendees, regarding the high number of artworks that had already been sold. Lots of sales at that early stage was considered to be a good sign in terms of the perceived artistic quality of the works being displayed, and in terms of the potential for Ann to sell more during the remainder of the exhibition period. Sold artworks are generally indicated through the placement of small red sticker dots on the artwork information that is displayed with the work. The 'red dots' have a role in letting potential customers know what artworks are still available for sale and acts a visual indicator that allows the exhibition attendees to very clearly see the level of success that is being achieved by the artist, which may impact on their own decision to purchase, or may inspire a level of motivation to achieve a similar level of sales at their own exhibition. In discussing the value of sales as a means through which the social validity of the artist is developed or maintained, Christina talked about the way in which others congratulated her when she made good sales at an exhibition, whilst highlighting the complexities associated with achieving the perception of 'true' artistic success:

when you get sales you are always congratulated and complimented on the success of the work. Compliments on the actual work - like how creative it is and well executed - are pretty much par for the course when you talk to people at the exhibition opening, but the compliments are more effusive and less..um..sad, if you have had some sales. It's a weird thing, though, because there is a very fine line, from a social sense, between being a successful 'true' artist, and being a sell-out. This line is not clearly drawn either, so it can mean that conversations with other artists can be a bit sensitive given that they try to ensure they consider your art to be of the 'true' ilk as opposed to the sell out variety (at least most of the time they do to your face [she smiles]....so success in the arts isn't just about making lots of money. It's about making money whilst maintaining artistic integrity, a thing that is pretty hard to pin down because it relies on other people's assessment a lot of the time - and that is often coloured by their perceptions of you as a person.

(Howe-Piening 2007)

The influence of other's evaluations regarding the sales of artworks, as described above, has the potential to have a modifying affect on the behaviour of artists in terms of their choice in pursuing either sales, or social and critical esteem, as a first priority in their artwork. It is possible that this modifying effect has a culturally productive, or reproductive, role within the art world as it may ensure that a focus on the central cultural 'value' of art and artists as creative social entities remains consistent across both the art world and in the wider social world. There is, of course, a vigorous art market in Australia and globally that relies on the buying and selling of art, and the making of profits. It is well documented, however, that artworks that are considered to be valuable within this context are usually those that are

seen as having a legitimacy and providence that is underpinned, not simply by their proven basic fiscal value, but also by notions of uniqueness, and artistic integrity, talent and creativity, which is often presented in the form of stories and narratives about the artist or the artwork and its social context. (Morphy 1995, Myers 2004, Plattner 1998). In alignment with this view, and focusing on the issues of personal identity, economic rationality and consumer risk, Plattner (1998) provides a useful analysis of the way in which the value of artworks is determined within local art markets, with the broad conclusion being that there exists a complex established interplay between the value of art as having multiple cultivated cultural attributes, including being an integral part of the identity of the artist, and as an object of often indeterminate commercial value that is based on an evaluation of its cultural and aesthetic credentials.

To the artists I worked with, there is a strong interconnectedness between their social standing as an artist and the value of their artworks. The factors that impact on the value of the art are very often cited as being based on the talent and skill of the artist and the quality of the artworks. This is, however, a highly contested notion which attracts a lot of commentary with regard to the various social factors involved in the value of cultural artefacts, including those that have been previously discussed regarding the perceived charisma, networking capacity and commercial acumen of certain artists²⁶. In terms of the impact of the value of artworks within the context of the exhibition, there is a strong imperative to charge more for comparable artworks at each subsequent exhibition:

The way it works is that I have to put higher prices down for the works at this exhibition than I did at the last. This shows that the value of my work is increasing and means that I might get lucky and attract some regular buyers. Its a bit of a two edged sword, though, because if the prices are too high no-one is going to buy my stuff, and then not having any sales at all also looks really bad...besides being bad for my income. There is not much that I can do if I want to be in the commercial side of things. Galleries expect and want the appearance (at least) of value going up.

(Howe-Piening 2007)

It is clear that making sales forms a key part of the production and maintenance of professional legitimacy for the artist. The importance of making sales is also further complemented by the achievement of good critical reviews which, if attained, helps to validate the work of the artist through extolling the artistic and social value of the works

²⁶ See Chapter 4: Doing Art

presented at an exhibition. The critic's role is one of evaluating the quality of the artwork in terms of the technical, creative, aesthetic and social merit. In this capacity the critic must have their own professional legitimacy, and be seen to possess strong knowledge of a range of visual art forms, their histories, techniques, social contexts and key players, in order to pass valid judgement on the work of artists (Osborne 2012). Critics usually demonstrate their expertise through making publicly available their own biographies relating to art, including their experience and qualifications. This is supported further by their inclusion in industry related publications that have strong legitimacy in the field. For example, the author of Ann's *Anticipation #1* exhibition review, which was published in the national art magazine Artlink, is a practicing artist who has a long history working in the field and has been the subject of similar reviews and overviews of his work since the 1970's (Artlink, 2005). Hamilton utilised his legitimacy in the field of art to articulate the ways in which Ann also met the various criteria for artistic legitimacy through interpreting the exhibition artwork's connection to the social world in which it is situated. In the case of *Anticipation #1* the critic focused on the way the work operated on abstract symbolic, personal, and socio-economic levels, including making reference to Ann's artistic 'renewal' portrayed in her exhibition by connecting it to Sartre's concept of 'existential despair'. The critic also made a connection between Ann's work and a new global order in the arts that was linked to a wider political and environmental agenda, and with similar trends within the contemporary art world. He went on to say that 'Behind every small offering (and this is an exhibition of many offerings), behind the superb craft and humour, one senses that there has been a harrowing inner journey towards renewal' (Hamilton, 2007), which confers some significant social and personal attributes onto the artist, including a strong technical and creative capacity (the 'craft') and an ability to effectively reflect her inner personal world outwards through the artworks, including rendering them readable and relatable through the social buffer and facilitator of humour.

The review generally comes after the exhibition opening but during the period when the exhibition is still showing. The tone of the review (positive or negative) is said to have the effect on the number of visitors and sales that an exhibition might achieve, but this is not something that can be quantified as there may be a number of factors influencing these particular outcomes. Although the artists I worked with were aware of the uncertain affect that reviews have on visitor numbers and sales of artworks, the impact of a good (or bad) review on the social relations, and resulting professional legitimacy, of the artist was unquestionable:

It's probably not all that helpful to wait for a review to come out in the local paper or a magazine, and to expect to get validated by it, but I always do look for them...and I read them pretty carefully. I have been offended and annoyed in the past if someone didn't 'get' what I was trying to do with my work, but I have also been surprised when someone has re-interpreted my stuff in a way that I didn't think of, but which sits really well with the work. Reviews are a topic of conversation with the other artists I see from time to time. We congratulate each other on the good ones, discuss the interpretations of the works, and criticise any negative comments as being the result of the critic not having a proper understanding of the intention of the art....reviews bond us together in a way

(Howe-Piening 2007)

The review, as described by Christina, has a complex role in the maintenance of an artist's personal and public professional and social validation and is appropriated as a social tool in order to support the maintenance of mutually cohesive relationships with other artists. Artists can also pick whole or parts of positive reviews to utilise in submissions for funding and exhibition space, during meetings with galleries and for marketing purposes on brochures or advertisements. The written format of a review allows for it to be dissected and recontextualised to suit the various purposes of the artist, which makes it a valuable tool that can support the professional development and status of the artist.

7.4. CONCLUSION

This chapter utilises the example of the art exhibition as a means to explicate the ways in which it is used to support the development and maintenance of an artist's professional and social legitimacy. The discussion focuses on the exhibition as a site for social engagement, and links it to other types of sociality engaged in by artists, in order to articulate the ways in which social engagement works to support the legitimacy aims. The two key notions of legitimacy and social relations formed a central focus of this discussion, which mirrors the concerns and interests expressed by the artists I worked with throughout my fieldwork. As it has been briefly touched on, artists engage in a wide range of social relations, which they see as being a central part of their life and work as artists. While space did not allow me to elaborate on these other forms of social engagement, the tradition of the exhibition is a highly relevant exemplar that, when explored, reveals a range of interconnected processes and practices that support the status and legitimacy of both the artist and the art world in which they operate. In this capacity I provided a discussion of the form of the exhibition and its enduring adherence to certain traditional practices. The successful performance of these practices allowed the artist and the exhibition attendees to display their intimate knowledge of the practices of the art world in a way that indicated their insider status, and

which allowed all the participants to actively engage in a network of reciprocal validation practices across a continuum of exhibition (and other arts based) events.

The highly social nature of an exhibition, in particular the opening event, was underpinned by a range of very specific roles and practices that worked to uphold the hierarchies in place within the art world, and which generally mirrored those in place within the more general structure of meritocratic societies. In this capacity, there was a strong social structure that was exhibited within the exhibition opening, with those considered to have deeper level of artistic status, experience, talent or skill placed meritocratically higher than those who were considered to be in possession of lesser artistic attributes. This was evidenced in the roles that were played out within the event, including in terms of which individuals made desirable opening speakers and esteemed guests. The more esteemed and legitimate the guests that attended the event were, the more status it conferred on the exhibiting artist. The artist, therefore, devoted considerable energy to cultivating relationships and networks that supported desirable outcomes in terms of the nature of the exhibition attendees.

The social legitimacy of the exhibiting artist was also dependent on the successful conceptualisation and display of creativity, talent and artistic knowledge through the effective display of artworks within the gallery space, which incorporated the creative interpretation of a narrow framework of display methods and traditions. Within this context, even though the basic format of all exhibitions is roughly the same (most objects on plinths or in display cases, and two dimensional objects hanging on walls) the configuration of objects within the gallery space was the focus of considerable thought and reflection in order to ensure that the most creative and reflective narrative interpretation of the works as a whole would be achieved. In the words of one artist, the exhibition space should present a 'narrative journey for the attending audience'. Working in interconnected concert with the more concrete factors of the people and space of the exhibition, the presentation of artistic legitimacy was further supported through providing evidence of the value of the artworks as expressed in the achievement of sales of displayed artwork and positive critical reviews. Both of these forms of validation (one might say quantitative and qualitative) were shown to have value for the artist and the artist's peers and colleagues, and this was evidenced through the import that was placed on them within the discourse that artists engaged in, and in terms of their contribution to the development of a professional profile that facilitated the sourcing of professional opportunities.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

It is a nice spring afternoon. The sun is shining and there is a warm breeze blowing as we sit in the artist's garden drinking tea. The artist picks up a small book from the table and hands it to me. She tells me that this is a scrapbook she made to document the last year of her previous relationship - a very difficult year in which she understood that 'the writing was on the wall'. I open the book and it has the appearance of a fulsome journal - it contains hand written passages, sketches, photographs and small objects. It is clearly a very personal object, and one that contains highly emotional and confronting thoughts and images. In one section there are a series of graphic photographs of a surgical procedure that the artist had done as a means to 'renew' herself. They are very difficult to look at - the flesh of her face cut away and re-stitched. I was left with a strong sense of unease after looking at the book as there were so many challenging ideas and feelings that it elicited in me about relationships, aging, being a woman... I asked the artist why she made this book. She explained that she always used her art as a way to express what was going on in her life, and so she hadn't much reflected on why she would make art out of such a personal and painful part of her world, other than to recognise that doing so would help her to manage those feelings. In that artist's opinion, this self expressive quality is a big part of what makes art so valuable to the artists themselves, but is also what makes it valuable to the other people exposed to it - 'they get to see the feelings and are allowed to spend some time with them'. The artist's book never made it into an exhibition, and was never made available for sale, but it is indicative of the all encompassing way in which the profession of artist influences the life and work of the individual practitioners who claim membership to that profession. In this capacity, the expressive and symbolic nature of art has the capability to allow people to explore elements of the world that may be too controversial or painful to confront through other social means. In this capacity, while many people assume that art should just be beautiful or visually engaging, art's nature can also be seen to be socially contentious, transgressive, and visually or emotionally challenging.

This thesis started with the stated desire to provide clarity and insight into the lives and work of the people who practice art - the artists. To my artist informants, art was consistently characterised as being a core part of their makeup, but artists also saw art as

being a central part of a wider society, in that all members of a society are exposed to art from the earliest times of their lives, and everyone responds to art. Within this context art has played a strong and influential role in presenting, or re-presenting western collective social and political histories and these same societies have provided social capital and resources to the establishment and ongoing development and veneration of art institutions, policies, events and leaders. This renders art a significant part of society and thus, in the opinion of many researchers, commentators and writers, makes it worthy social phenomena to study.

This thesis was supported by the data collected from my ethnographic fieldwork project, the methods, processes and concepts of which I chose during the project design process, and applied during its conduct. In writing this thesis, my aim was to paint a descriptive and holistic picture of the life and work of South Australian artists, which encompassed the social, practical and economic elements of their lives, but argued that underpinning and influencing these elements were a number of key normalised social ideas and understandings about the role of artist and art practice that affects artists' experiences and practical outcomes of what they do. In this capacity the thesis presented a range of descriptions and analysis of particular representative aspects of the artists' professional and personal worlds, which provides evidence of the range of means through which the social role of artist is understood, expressed and legitimised on a personal and public level. This included raising, and establishing the importance of, key practices and beliefs that emerged as being central to the artists' professional and personal lives, examples of which I observed regularly over the course of my ethnographic field research. While various factors, such as socio-economic developments, or political policy, within South Australia, are acknowledged to have a potential impact on the practice of the artists I worked with, it should be noted that explorations of these factors is not part of the purview of this thesis. This is, however, an area that is deserving of further research in order to determine the scale of impact these elements may have on the entire cultural economy of the state.

The thesis aligns with the emerging body of practices within contemporary anthropology by taking a somewhat methodologically divergent approach from a 'classical' anthropological study in terms of the field sites, fieldwork regimens and participants that were chosen. This included conducting participant observation and fieldwork on a part-time basis in my own home town of Adelaide, South Australia, a choice that was based on a number of practical choices including the maintenance of a domestic and professional life. The impact of

undertaking research in this way, including its potential impact on the quality and nature of the research data I collected, is difficult to quantify. A key consideration, however, was in addressing the balance between the necessity of maintaining a sense of cultural novelty in my familiar field site with the need to develop familiarity and intimacy with my research informants. I didn't necessarily see these two requirements as being incompatible as it remains an imperative within all ethnographic research sites to be able to be aware of one's own cultural assumptions whilst simultaneously developing successful familiar relationships with individuals and groups. The unique process and ethos of ethnography may support the researchers' capacity to be successful in navigating such complexities as, according to Ortner, fieldwork is 'perhaps the only basis of Anthropology's distinctive contribution to the human sciences...[which develops] our capacity...to take the perspective of the folks on the shore...[and]...allows us to learn anything at all, even in our own culture, beyond what we already know' (Ortner 1984:143).

The research and analysis presented in this thesis provides a contribution to the existing body of knowledge of the art world and art practice, with reference to understanding artists within the regional Australian context of South Australia, and with reference to the importance of the role of artist to cultural maintenance, renewal and production. My research supports the development of anthropological knowledge relating to the practice of artists and their social and cultural understanding and use of material culture and space as a means to uphold and renew social norms, develop and perform professional and personal identity, and facilitate social engagement. The thesis also contributes to further understanding the perceived unconventional and integrated way in which sole practising artists undertake their life and practice, and demonstrates that this group of individuals works in a manner that differs significantly from other professional groups in society. This includes providing a range of data and conclusions relating to the way in which they construct and utilise their unconventional work spaces, and the flexible, transgressive and holistic manner in which they conduct their practice. Additionally, the contribution that this thesis makes to the growing body of material culture studies is predominantly in relation to the specific way in which artists, as highly skilled material culture workers, utilise their strong understanding of the significance and symbolism of materials and objects to engage others in social ideas and issues, and to support the ongoing production and maintenance of their own identities and agency. In this capacity the thesis supports, and builds upon well founded and evidenced assertions across a broad range of social arenas, the notion that material objects have the capacity to develop and transmit social agency and meaning

through the interaction with, and movement through, the social world. It also contributes to the body of work in relation to the social and cultural use of space through focusing on the specific spatial environments of the artist's studio and the exhibition space, and provides ethnographic evidence that supports an interpretation of the spaces as having actively conceptual, symbolic and functional aspects that contributes to individual agency, and to social engagement, renewal and reproduction.

The contribution made to these fields do not necessarily constitute significant new development in the fields, or in the discipline of anthropology. The work, however, contributes overall to gaining an important understanding of the way in which artists operate, both as individual practitioners and as members of the wider art world, including supporting contemporary understandings of the way in which these cultural and creative workers negotiate and appropriate the material world.

A key focus of this thesis was in exploring the social contribution of the artists I worked with, and to provide a framework for understanding the way they experienced their input into the social and cultural world of South Australia, including their participation in cultural and creative activities, exploring social ideas, and the production of meaningful objects for public consumption. The social role of artist, when well delivered, was also demonstrated to support the ongoing legitimacy of artists within the artworld, the establishment and maintenance of which was considered to be fundamental to the way in which artists frame and understand their professional agency, obligations and success. Throughout the thesis I argued for the presence of, and explored, a number of key iterative themes and findings. These findings include the following: 1. that artists play a socially facilitative role, which benefits society and contributes to their ongoing professional legitimacy; 2. that artists hold a unique and multifaceted place in society that is informed and influenced by art world traditions and ideals and; 3. that artists are highly skilled in the conscious creation, appropriation and dissemination of meaning through the manipulation of the material world. In articulating these findings, I presented the evidence for them in various specific ways within the thesis chapters, but they also emerged as more general themes when viewed across the thesis as a whole.

In arguing that artists play a socially facilitative role, which benefits society and contributes to their ongoing professional legitimacy, the thesis developed a focus on the social and cultural facilitation role that artists see themselves as undertaking as a part of their activities

as cultural and creative workers within society. This role formed an essential part of the way in which my informants saw themselves as both individuals, as operators within an art world social setting, and as members of the wider cultural economy of South Australia and Australia. The ways in which this was expressed in the everyday life and work of my informants included the manner through which the role of 'artist' was developed and internalised by the individuals I worked with. This led to a feeling that the role itself was an inherent part of their person rather than just something they did as a profession. The thesis, therefore, discussed my informants' development into socially appropriate and active artists through articulating their initial 'calling' that drove them to become art practitioners, followed by a description of the ways in which the inherent artist within was socialised and educated into the role through a range of social processes that often included the embodied induction into artistic practices, skills and lifestyles. The artistic imperative felt by my informants was seen as an important part of the journey to becoming an artist and this, combined with a number of other essential specific attributes, such as the possession and development of talent and creativity, contributed to the formation of my informant's artistic personas and practices, which encompassed the notion of cultural and social facilitation as a core element of their activities.

The imperative to assume responsibility for being cultural facilitators and mediators, which was expressed by the artists I worked with, was demonstrated and expressed in multifaceted ways depending on the particular circumstances of the individual artists. The artists I worked with all expressed some level engagement with, and desire to, explore and raise issues relating to their social world, including being invested in contributing to cultural and social renewal through presenting interesting, engaging and/or contentious ideas through their artworks. Additionally, the notion that artists should play a role in cultural and social facilitation is one that was considered to be accepted across wider society as much as it was within the discrete confines of the art world. This was articulated as being part of an implicit social contract that is applied to artists, in which they are given unique social latitude to explore and articulate controversial issues and live unconventional lifestyles, but are also expected to contribute to the processes of cultural renewal and maintenance.

The thesis further articulated the scope of the artists' social and cultural facilitation role by aligning it to the narratives they constructed of themselves and their society through the objects they made. In this capacity, it was demonstrated that the artworks they produced were designed and constructed to be viewed as a means through which ideas about our

social world could be held and disseminated and, which as a result, had the capacity to incite reflection, discourse, and possibly change, in relation to a broad range of social issues. The artworks, therefore, had the capacity to contribute to the representation or production of social dialogue, or cultural knowledge and practice, and could also function as a way to express the inner emotional worlds and understandings of their artist makers on a more personal level. In demonstrating these aspects of artists' practice I presented a number of examples that demonstrated the broad range of ways in which social issues were presented and disseminated through artworks, including articulating the potential impacts of eliciting social discourse in this manner. These impacts included the potential for social boundaries to be violated, such as in the case of the jeweller Fiona's *'Lift and Separate'*²⁷ sculpture piece, or Azlan McLennan's *'Proudly UnAustralian'* (2006).

The ways in which art operates as a culturally and socially facilitative phenomenon was also demonstrated through the growing field of art in health, which incorporated a range of activities including the exhibition of artworks in unconventional places, such as hospitals and health clinics, through to the delivery of art classes and art making sessions as a form of therapeutic intervention for people with both physical and mental illnesses. The socially therapeutic and regenerative nature of art was also articulated as being a key driver of the public endorsement of art as being worthy of both policy attention and the conferral of regular public funding. This was clearly demonstrated in the quantified benefit of the arts, as a key part of the cultural economy, to society overall.

In this thesis I also argued that artists hold a unique and multifaceted place in society that is informed and influenced by art world traditions and ideals. In arguing for this position, I presented a range of ethnographic evidence demonstrating that my informants understanding of themselves as artists, and the ways in which they worked, was underpinned by set notions of what is it to be an artist and 'do art'. In exploring the idea of the traditional ideal artist, the thesis highlighted the ways in which this idea was integrated into the identity and practice of my informants. This included articulating the importance of talent and creativity, highlighting the ways in which they constructed and used their spatial environments, describing the actual doing of art-making, and exploring the relationships that artists established and fostered. A key factor in situating the making of art within a traditional art world context was to highlight the role of talent and creativity as important

²⁷ See Chapter 6 of this thesis.

factors in the development of professional skill, success and legitimacy. The possession of talent and creativity were demonstrated to be highly desired attributes that were considered to be naturally given, but also able to be further developed. The professional ideal of the 'proper' artist extols the importance of discipline and hard work as essential elements in the making of a skilled and legitimate artist. These moralistically framed functions were also tied to the appropriate development of talent and creativity, which was considered to underpin the design and production of effective and engaging art pieces that met traditional art world standards of quality. In this capacity, it was deemed to be a waste of these attributes if an artist did not make full and proper use of them through their development and application.

The artist's studio was also demonstrated as being another forum in which the traditional ideals of the art world were presented and played out through the construction and utilisation of the space and the material culture within. In this capacity the art studio presented a range of opportunities for the artist to demonstrate their belonging to the traditional world of art, including through the highly conscious placement and utilisation of significant tools and other objects that speak to art world traditions, and to the public and personal identity of the artist as a member of that world. The creation of the ideal studio, in terms of art world traditions and norms, incorporated the consideration of a range of material and environmental elements such as the type and configuration of the equipment and materials that an artist chose to use, and the way in which light and sound were sourced, considered and applied within the space. The way that the body of the artist moved around the space during the making of art, or the manner in which the artist chose and made use of the tools, materials and equipment at hand, were also articulated as having strong roots in the disciplinary traditions that were learned during studio practice sessions within arts education institutions.

Furthermore, the thesis highlighted the role of education as being central to the process of inducting artists into adopting traditional art world practices and tastes, which included emphasising the combined value of teaching embodied studio techniques and practice, with a more socially focused induction into the lifestyle and identity of the artist through the modelling provided by other established and novice contemporaries. In this capacity the importance of the social modelling that occurred in art school was described as something that extended beyond the education process and was practiced and performed routinely as a part of the artists' integrated professional and private identity. The discussions with artists

that were presented in the thesis, therefore, showed that they engaged with a range of externally constructed social aspects of being an artist, and that their own understanding and enactment of their lifestyles displayed a number of these stereotypical or traditional characteristics.

The forum of the exhibition, and its associated social relations and performance practices, provided an additional opportunity for the artists I worked with to demonstrate their adherence to a range of traditional art world ideals and standards. In this capacity, the thesis discussed the manner in which the exhibition form and participants conformed to a familiar framework, within which the creativity of the artist was given latitude to explore. In articulating the way in which the traditional elements of the exhibition were expressed, the thesis articulated the importance of achieving a successful event that allowed the artist and the exhibition attendees to display their intimate knowledge of the practices of the art world in a way that indicated their insider status, and which allowed all the participants to actively engage in a network of reciprocal validation practices across a continuum of exhibition events. This included a description and analysis of the schedule and format of the events, the participants and their roles, and the creation of exhibition displays of artworks. These descriptions clearly demonstrated the varied ways in which the exhibition events aligned with, and performed, the traditional ideals and practices that structure the art world.

Throughout the thesis I also presented a range of ethnographic data to support my argument that artists are highly skilled in the creation, appropriation and dissemination of meaning through their manipulation of the material world. In particular the thesis had a focus on articulating the importance of possessing and applying expertise in materially mediated meaning through their artworks, as well as through the development and expression of their creativity, and through the spaces that they create and utilise. Within the context of the well-established understanding of the social and cultural importance of material objects the thesis argues that, while all members of any particular society are well versed in the interpretation and appropriation of the things within that society, visual artists are more expert at symbolic representation than the average person. This prowess is positioned as being a product of the ongoing development and practice of artists' naturally given talent and creativity, which is expressed through the regular production of a diverse range of objects that are designed to be compelling, stimulating and meaningful. Working within this context, I explored the way in which my informants conceptualised and created their art pieces to communicate their emotions, ideas and agendas, including very consciously

building meaning and symbolism into their artworks in order to create a narrative for the pieces they were presenting. The creation of these meaningful artworks involved a range of stages from the conceptualisation and design of the object through to its practical making and exhibition. This entire process was demonstrated to be one in which the artist's focus on the material world was a predominant factor, including in relation to the choosing of the raw materials required to make the artwork, the tools and equipment to be used and the techniques for putting the pieces together to create a particular form that successfully carried symbolic meaning. The thesis also argued, however, that the symbolic representation of meaning can be difficult to establish and maintain as there is always a level of subjectivity with regard to the way in which objects and symbols can be interpreted by particular individuals or groups. This was exemplified through the ethnographic examples I presented, which both demonstrated the specificity of the meanings that were consciously attached to the artworks made by artists, but also presented a number of ways in which the works had been understood differently, either from an academic point of view, or another's subjective perspective. My informants were acutely aware of the relative instability and complexity, associated with interpreting the meaning of artworks and, in order to compensate for that they tended to utilise a range of supporting tools, including attaching text based introductions to displayed artworks, to steer the audience in the 'correct' interpretive direction.

The importance of well developed creativity and talent was also positioned as being significant factors in the successful making of meaningful artwork objects. In this capacity the pedagogical elements of art were shown to have a key role in developing artists' skills in material and symbolic representation, which incorporated the highly embodied practices of learning to use tools, techniques and spaces to make art, and in learning to 'be' an artist through social participation in the art school culture. The significant spatial environment of the art studio was demonstrated to be an important centre of the materially mediated work and practice of the artists, including being the space in which artworks were produced, but also being a materially symbolic place in its own right - a space that was constructed, maintained and utilised to express the identity of the occupier. Within the studio the material world was a dominant force in which the equipment, tools and other objects placed within the space had very specific roles and meaning attached to them, and the tools and equipment were chosen for both practical and personal reasons. Within the broad scope of the possible tools and equipment that could be chosen, my informants made very conscious

choices about what actually was chosen to occupy the space of the studio. In this thesis I articulated the way in which these choices were made around such objects, which incorporated a strong element of adherence to art world traditions, in addition to a range of other specific individual social or political choices. The thesis argues that, while the material focus of the artist was strongly embodied in the artworks and the spaces that the artist constructs, this focus also extends to the inter-subjective relationship that the artist had with the tools and materials they used on a regular basis. In this capacity it was demonstrated that the way in which an artist worked with their tools, media and materials was something that, through embodied learning processes, became deeply internalised within the artist, a process which was both observed during the course of art making practice, as well as being articulated as a phenomenon familiar to artists. The relationship that was developed and maintained between the artists, and their tools and materials, was articulated as an intimacy that was developed through the continual embodied practicing of learned skills to the point of being a completely automatic and 'natural' process. The impact of this intimate connection with the tools and materials was considered to include the provision of support for the artist in developing a more subjective and personal connection with their artworks, in terms of having a more intuitive and deep relationship with the symbolic, textual and aesthetic qualities of the materials and the applied techniques.

Finally, this study has the potential to be utilised, and further developed, to inform and influence an understanding of the way in which the beneficial social impacts that artists deliver can be fostered through aligning systems of support for artists with their specific ways of working, and their unique social needs and perspectives. This is particularly pertinent in a time when the funding for the Arts in Australia is being limited, and where new public policy preferences more traditional, and arguably more elitist, forms of the arts for the conferral of funding²⁸. In this capacity, bodies of qualitative evidence, such as this study, combined with other quantitative research, could provide an empirical basis for making funding decisions that provide significant targeted benefit to artists that has flow on effects for the rest of the community.

²⁸ See, for example, articles on the newly introduced policies of the former federal Art's Minister George Brandis: <<http://theconversation.com/leaving-legacies-behind-arts-policy-for-the-here-and-now-48094>>

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