

Strategies and Trajectories in the 'Space of Possibles': Artists' Odyssey in Navigating the Contemporary Art Field

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Abstract

Deze masterscriptie onderzoekt hoe beginnende kunstenaars het kunstveld betreden en navigeren met behulp van Grounded Theory. De studie onderzoekt of de theoretische kaders van Bourdieu's veldtheorie, Bowness' 'cirkels van erkenning' en Wohl's 'creatieve visies' toepasbaar zijn in de hedendaagse Vlaamse en Brusselse context. De studie maakt onderscheid tussen naar binnen en naar buiten gerichte strategieën en benadrukt het belang van beide voor het begrip van de trajecten van beginnende kunstenaars. De data suggereren dat verschillen in kapitaalsamenstellingen bij beginnende kunstenaars slechts gedeeltelijk de variatie in trajecten binnen de 'ruimte van mogelijkheden' verklaren. Beginnende kunstenaars volgen niet noodzakelijk het lineaire traject voorspeld door de 'cirkels van erkenning'. Het concept van 'creatieve visies' werd bevestigd. Tot slot onderscheidt de studie vier theoretische trajecten van beginnende kunstenaars die elk op hun eigen specifieke manier het kunstveld navigeren, afhankelijk van hun interactie met het commerciële of onafhankelijke segment ervan.

Sleutelwoorden: beginnende kunstenaar, strategie, ruimte van mogelijkheden, Pierre Bourdieu, habitus, kapitaal, cirkels van erkenning, creatieve visies

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1. Introduction

Some time ago, I engaged in a dialogue with a contemporary art museum director, during which we discussed a local artist, whom he deemed insufficiently qualified for museum presentation despite years of work. This artist is an active member of a collective, has showcased his work in various local and supralocal settings, and has even authored an artist book. The lack of acknowledgement from this prominent gatekeeper did not deter the artist from pursuing his career trajectory, and he continues to participate in a variety of artist-run initiatives. The director's critique, labelling this artist's body of work as “almost but not quite” lingered in my thoughts long after our conversation and ultimately inspired me for this academic endeavour to explore the grey zone between “already *in* the art field” and “not quite there yet”.

In this paper, I would like to shed light on the experiences of beginning artists at the start of their careers using the theoretical framework of field theory as a backdrop. According to field theory, social life is organised as a series of fields, each with its own rules (Bourdieu, 1984). The art field is one of these social fields. The internal hierarchies are organised around various forms of capital: cultural, social, economic and symbolic. Members of a field must accumulate and strategically deploy their capital to navigate it. Cultural capital refers to knowledge, skills, and education; social capital pertains to networks and relationships; economic capital involves financial resources; and symbolic capital encompasses prestige and recognition. Field theory also introduces the concept of *illusio*, the investment in and belief in the value of the game being played — in this case, the art. The art field exemplifies a particular logic: “the economic world reversed”, where the struggle for autonomy and artistic freedom implies an explicit negative stance towards economic motivation in artistic pursuits. The trajectories of navigating the art field that the artists perceive depend on the 'space of possibles' visible to them. In its turn, the space of possibles is informed by their capital constellation, — or the position they take within the art field, — as well as the socio-historical context they are in.

Academic literature provides mostly negative definitions of the group of beginning artists: they have not yet had time to develop a personal style (Ollivier, 1997), they do not have a solid reputation yet (Verdaasdonk, 1994), they hardly have any exhibition experience and are likely to have naïve views of the field (Komarova, 2018), they are yet to learn to price their work (Warchol, 2019). Oftentimes descriptions “beginning” and “young” go in one breath, adding an age component to the group definition. Negative definitions can be useful in delineating the boundaries of a concept, but they may not provide a comprehensive understanding on their own.

For this paper, I define the beginning artists as a group of people who have started their artistic pursuits between 2016 and 2022. Traditionally, art education provides necessary credentials and basic networks. However, an art academy diploma is not a prerequisite, and sometimes individuals enter the art field after having had studies or careers in another field. They can enter the field through participating and engaging in relevant networks. There is no age limit to start an art career: even though scholars and art workers alike often address “young beginning artists” and numerous violations of anti-ageism principles occur in contests for “beginning artists under 35”, anyone can commence pursuing artistry at any age. Being at the beginning of a career means for this group that they engage with many aspects of the art field for the first time and are in an active process of creating meaning for it. From the perspective of field theory, this means that these people occupy a similar position having gained little to no symbolic capital.

There are different reasons why it is of interest to study the perspective of debuting visual artists on their career development in the art field. None of these artists have yet experienced significant major events, such as solo exhibitions, publications, etc. In the later stage, some might become hobbyists or leave the occupation altogether (Van Winkel, Gielen, & Zwaan, 2012) while some might continue an artistic career. Observing their lived experiences in the early phase, this research can look indiscriminately at how beginning artists perceive and navigate the art field which can later lead to different career choices. This allows one to focus on the strategies without preoccupation with the ‘success rate’ of any of them, as this preoccupation can act as a filter, biasing the observations.

The theoretical framework of this study is extended by the concept of ‘circles of recognition’ through which the artists pass during their career development (Bowness, 1989). According to this model, artists are first recognised by their colleagues, then by the institutions, later by the commercial circuit, and finally, by the broader public. This theoretical model proposes sequential stages in career development: you need to pass the first circle of recognition to be noticed in the next one. As academic literature demonstrates, the particular circles to pass may differ. In the American context, the artists usually start with a diploma of higher art education (MFA), then a local prize or grant, consequently a first gallery, then magazines that publish critiques, then prestigious private collections, group or solo shows in museums, after which major international biennale shows may follow until the final destination — secondary market of auctions (Thornton, 2012). Similarly, for French artists there are also scholarly defined “levels of recognition”: belonging to the world of contemporary art, local grants, state grants, residencies or travelling support offered by “Culture France”, group exhibitions in local or regional art centres ideally followed by a group exhibition in a Parisian space and, finally, entrance in the private sector of art

galleries (Heinich, 2015). The reality of career trajectories in the art field can be more complex and varied than any singular model of circles of recognition might suggest. While some artists may indeed linearly progress through these stages, many others may experience nonlinear paths, encountering challenges, opportunities, and recognition in different ways and at different times. Not all artists may see a museum or gallery presentation as their ultimate goal, contrary to what these studies seem to suggest. In this study, I explore the extent to which the beginning artists in Flanders and Brussels are aware of these circles of recognition. By examining their experiences and the strategies they employ to gain recognition, I aim to understand whether these artists follow the sequential path outlined by Bowness or if they navigate the art field through more fluid and diverse routes.

Finally, the theoretical framework is supported by the concept of 'creative visions' (Wohl, 2021), which implies that artists — as well as the other participants of the art field — develop distinct personal visions for their practice. These creative visions can consist of choices for specific styles, mediums, materials, or colours. They lay the foundation for communication between various actors within the art field. For example, gallerists and collectors often specialise in certain types of art. These preferences signify their creative visions, which in turn attract them to artists whose works resonate with these preferences. The current study seeks to confirm the presence of creative visions in the practice of beginning artists in the local Flemish and Brussels context and aims to establish a theoretical link between the concept of creative visions and field theory.

Considering the precarious socio-economic position of the visual artists — the lowest income and the highest costs (Siongers, Van Steen, & Lievens, 2016), the (mental) health risks for the starting artists that go together with the precariousness, it becomes essential to scrutinise the details of how individuals embark on their artistic careers. How does this extreme precarity inform the choices that beginning artists make? This includes examining debutants' perspectives on institutional and commercial circuits, and the delicate balance between financial stability and artistic practice. Ultimately, this study seeks to provide useful insights into how beginning artists navigate the decision-making processes and into the complex interplay between their aspirations and the challenges they face when finding their path in the art field. This aligns with the principles of the sociological theory of symbolic interactionism, which emphasises the importance of subjective meanings, interactions, and interpretations in shaping social behaviour and institutions.

This research paper aims to explore the process through which emerging individual visual artists gain entry into and navigate the contemporary Flemish art scene as seen from the perspective of the artists themselves. This entry is not instantaneous but rather evolves gradually, involving continuous decision-making. Constrained by factors like economic, cultural, and symbolic capital,

artists face ongoing choices regarding the optimal utilisation of these resources (Bourdieu, 1996). They must weigh options such as dedicating time to studio work, networking endeavours, or income-generating pursuits. In navigating these pivotal choices, artists devise strategies that profoundly shape their artistic paths over time. Additionally, the paper examines the nuanced attitudes of emerging artists towards both the non-profit sector of the art field and the commercial art market, exploring potential factors underlying these distinctions.

Upon completing an arts education, graduates do not receive a predefined roadmap with predetermined destinations and milestones. This absence of guidance is not unique; it is a shared experience among young professionals across various fields. Occupational sociology has delved into the concept of professionalisation, the process through which certain occupations strive to establish and uphold professional status or autonomy (Evetts, 2003; Birkett & Evans, 2005). Similarly, beginning artists undergo this process of professionalisation, akin to those in the medical or judicial sectors. For visual artists, the absence of a fixed employer and clear career trajectories presents distinct challenges. Unlike many other professions, there are no dedicated career fairs for artists, a void that may be lamentable. Furthermore, artists are often expected to supplement their artistic pursuits with alternative employment — an expectation that may seem incongruous for those trained in fields like law or sociology. The art field presents specific deviations in the mechanisms of acquiring credentials necessary for gaining a reputation and attaining status as a member of the art community. In the singular regime of contemporary art (Heinich, 1991), discussions surrounding what constitutes art have replaced the former inquiries into whether a piece meets the criteria of good artwork. Consequently, in a landscape devoid of ultimate criteria, anything can be deemed art, compelling artists to articulate why each piece merits such recognition (Van Winkel, Gielen, and Zwaan, 2012). This dynamic results in every new work posing a risk to the artist's entire reputation, demanding a continuous enhancement of quality, and bearing the potential to undo previous efforts with each new exhibition (Verdaasdonk, 1994). From this perspective, researching the lived experiences of beginning artists illuminates not only the intricacies of their career paths but also provides insights into the dynamics of professionalisation within the art field. Examining how these artists navigate challenges and uncertainties deepens understanding of the evolving nature of professional identities, the negotiation of artistic legitimacy, and the complexities of status attainment in today's cultural milieu.

In this study I will not attempt to sketch a map of the art field with career paths passing through recognition circles marked on it, nor will I conduct a quantitative study to determine patterns of aesthetic dispositions in the contemporary Flemish art field. Rather, I focus on the lived experiences of 25 interviewed individuals and myself and focus on the qualitative aspects that shape

their artistic journeys. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the nuanced narratives, personal struggles, and unique perspectives that contribute to the diverse trajectories within the contemporary Flemish art field. By prioritising qualitative research methods, I aim to capture the richness of individual stories, shedding light on the subjective dimensions of artistic careers. The emphasis on lived experiences provides a more holistic view, acknowledging the intricacies of decision-making, the impact of external influences, and the dynamic interplay between artists and the various spheres of the art field. By adopting a qualitative lens, the research aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities inherent in the career development of visual artists in the Flemish context. The responses to these inquiries draw upon insights gleaned from a comprehensive dataset of semi-structured in-depth interviews, auto-ethnographic journals, field observations, and relevant podcasts. To navigate the diverse and extensive dataset, I opted for an adapted Grounded Theory method, tailored to accommodate practical constraints such as time limitations.

Ultimately, this study aims to critically evaluate theoretical frameworks in light of empirical evidence to understand how well the complexities of artists' career trajectories are explained by them. This paper explores the gap between theoretical models, outlined by Bourdieu, Bowness, Wohl, and lived experiences, shedding light on the realities faced by neophytes entering the art field. How do beginning artists in Flanders and Brussels accumulate and leverage different forms of capital, what strategies do they employ, what trajectories appear in their space of possibles, how do they engage with different segments of the art field, and balance artistic freedom with external pressures? By attempting to answer these questions the current study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how beginning artists navigate the vast ocean of the art field and to reveal both the utility and the limitations of field theory in explaining the artists' trajectories.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Mise-en-scène in Bourdieu's terms

The *mise-en-scène* of this theoretical inquiry consists of the field of cultural production as described by Pierre Bourdieu in his substantial work “The Rules of Art” (1996). This field comprises various positions and is inhabited by individuals struggling to improve their relative positions (1996). Institutions such as museums, galleries, publishers, but also press and education institutions, as well as individuals — collectors, critics, curators and artists — give this field its shape and steer its development. The field of cultural production evolves in a continuous and tense relationship with the field of power: in the XIX century, it gained (relative) autonomy from governmental, religious and commercial influences. “Art for art’s sake” was born as a non-apologetic art production that does not justify its existence by moral, ideological, economic, or any

other heteronomous influences (Bourdieu, 1996). Decisions taken within the autonomous field are informed by the internal logic of that field only. Autonomous art for Bourdieu is the art that has been created without the influence of heteronomous powers, where the artist alone has chosen the subject, the medium and the means of execution and has created the works exactly in the way that she alone wanted (1996). From this point of view art practices that take a political, ecological, or other engaged stance, and involve collaboration with non-artists, are heteronomous. If Bourdieu were still alive, he might offer a more nuanced perspective but in his writings he appears to favour autonomy over heteronomy, associating the transcendental autonomous field with the preservation of cultural heritage: *although it has its own laws, transcendent of consciousness and of individual wills, cultural heritage, which exists in a materialised and in an incorporated state (in the form of a habitus functioning as a sort of historical transcendental), only exists and effectively persists (meaning actively) in and through the struggles located in fields of cultural production; that is, cultural heritage exists by and for the agents disposed and able to assure its continued reactivation* (1996).

Later on, a separate sector of consecrated art production emerged within this autonomous field of cultural production and thus a new struggle came about: the one between consecrated and non-consecrated art production: those artists who have been in the avant-garde a generation ago, take upon consecrated positions, dictating the rules of the game, gatekeeping neophytes and formulating distinction between “good” and “bad” art. In the meantime, new artists take upon avant-garde positions, exploring new niches of contemporary art. Positions within the art field should not be confused with position-takings: the strategies, opinions, and values of individuals who occupy those distinct positions in the cultural field. Position-takings can help individuals or groups gain cultural capital and move up the hierarchy. Positions, on the other hand, refer to an individual or group's location within the social and cultural hierarchy of the field.

Why do different individuals find their place in different regions of the art field and, more importantly, how do they change their positions? According to Bourdieu (1996), they are equipped with various types of capital that define their starting positions and guide their future navigation in the field. Of course, any type of capital can vary from small to large. Economic capital is similar to what is habitually understood by this term in daily life: financial assets, wealth, type and frequency of income. For visual artists in particular, economic capital indicates whether the artist is dependent on income from her artistic work to produce new work and how far she can manage her time to dedicate it to the creation of art. Social capital comprises meaningful connections with other members of the field or other fields who exercise influence on the field of cultural production (especially in the field of power). In the world of visual artists, the word “network” describes this

phenomenon particularly well and includes connections with other artists and curators, gallerists and museums' directors, collectors and patrons, journalists and writers. Cultural capital refers to the knowledge, skills, and cultural assets that individuals and groups possess, which can be used to gain social status and power within the field. In the case of visual artists, a diploma from a prestigious art academy provides significant cultural capital (often alongside social capital in the form of connections with other graduates, professors who are themselves active artists, various curators invited for jury evaluations, etc.). Various kinds of capital can be inherited and earned during one's lifetime. Symbolic capital, distinct yet interconnected with these other forms, is crucial in understanding how power and influence are maintained and exercised in society (1996). Symbolic capital, according to Pierre Bourdieu, refers to the resources available to an individual based on honour, prestige, or recognition, and serves as a key mechanism in social power dynamics (1996). Bourdieu defines it as a form of capital that functions through social recognition and legitimisation, often expressed through titles, distinctions, or other markers of social status. An artist who has only group shows on her CV has less symbolic capital than her counterpart who has had a solo show in an independent off-space, who in turn has less symbolic capital than the one who has won a prestigious prize or has been exhibited by a major museum. In Bourdieu's framework, symbolic capital is essentially the form that different types of capital take when perceived and recognised as legitimate and valuable within a social field. For instance, an individual's educational qualifications (cultural capital) or social connections (social capital) gain additional value when they are publicly acknowledged and respected (symbolic capital).

Bourdieu argued that cultural fields are organised hierarchically, with different actors vying for cultural capital and recognition (1984). There is a certain homology between the positions within the field and the position-takings of individuals. Not only are the artists struggling for position, but the whole field is organised according to the same logic. Galleries and museums each compete with one another, and the strategies chosen by these actors tend to bring them together in clusters. The example provided by Bourdieu in *The Rules of Art* describes the literary field but essentially illustrates what can be observed in the visual arts today (1996). Charles Baudelaire was an outcast in the public eye. He chose to publish *Les Fleurs du Mal* with Poulet-Malassis, a small publisher not much loved by nor caring for the broad public. This relative freedom allowed Poulet-Malassis to be much more engaged with the poets with whom he worked. Their relative position in the field can be described as having low economic capital and high cultural capital.

A contemporary example of this structural organisation of the field would be the relationship between the contemporary art museum S.M.A.K. and the artist-run platform croxhapox in Ghent. The museum was founded in 1999, the artist-run platform several years prior in 1990.

Both were called into existence because of an urgent need for presentation space for contemporary art: S.M.A.K. was initiated by curator Jan Hoet, who initially claimed some space inside the Museum of Fine Arts, croxhapox was initiated by young artists Guido De Bruyn, Laura van en Sjoerd Paridaen in the workshop of Guido and Laura. Both organisations occupy very distinct positions in the field, and the people who run them, their partner institutions, and the artists they show form different circles. The local individual artists tend to start their careers with croxhapox (or other independent spaces founded later). As time goes they undertake steps, — or position-takings, — to 'grow' into museum presentation. These steps can include participating in “Common People”, a contest for recent graduates with an exhibition in S.M.A.K. as a reward for the finalists. Until recently, artists could apply for a postgraduate residency at HISK, which also had close connections with S.M.A.K. and was located nearby.

It is tempting to apply this homological principle mechanically; however, Bourdieu explicitly warned against doing so. It can very well be the case that people with similar capital possessions make very different career choices which lead them to very different places in the field. The concept of habitus plays a major role in explaining this variation. Habitus represents an internalised framework of dispositions, inclinations, and expectations, shaped by an individual's social and cultural milieu. Habitus is structured by the field and simultaneously structures it. Within the cultural field, an artist's habitus, sculpted by their socio-economic background and cultural context, serves as an imperceptible force guiding decisions and strategies (1983). Cultural capital, an integral facet of habitus, contributes to its formation by embedding acquired knowledge and skills into an individual's predispositions and worldview. The alignment of an individual's habitus with prevailing norms and values significantly influences the accumulation of symbolic capital, impacting their choices in the pursuit of legitimacy and recognition within the art field.

At the same time, the actions of the individual cannot be accessed without taking into account the context in wherein she operates. The term 'space of possibles' (Bourdieu, 1996) refers to the conditions and constraints that limit the possible actions. This means that, although an individual's position defines their position-taking, the space of possibles can cause another individual with a similar position but in a different historical or cultural context to adopt different strategies. Visual artists navigate the art field, meaning they have a certain vision of it, but their vision depends on their position within the field. For example, a beginning artist in Flanders with limited symbolic capital may focus on building local connections and participating in regional exhibitions to gain visibility. In contrast, a beginning artist with a similar lack of symbolic capital but operating in a major global art hub like New York might adopt strategies that include leveraging social media and seeking opportunities in international galleries. Despite both artists being at a

similar starting point in terms of their career and resources, the space of possibles in their respective contexts influences the paths they pursue. Thus, the broader cultural and historical context, as well as the specific dynamics of the art field in different regions, shape the strategies and actions of visual artists as they attempt to establish their careers.

The concepts outlined above shape the *mise-en-scène* for the actual topic of this paper: how do beginning artists enter and navigate the art field? The idea of the struggle for recognition and positions in the field of cultural production can be extremely useful in describing this process. According to Bourdieu, individuals and groups within the field can employ various strategies — or position-takings — within the field to establish their authority and legitimacy (1984). He identifies some specific strategies that neophytes can employ. One such strategy is the conversion of one type of capital into another: high economic capital, for example, allows for following a prestigious and expensive education programme, which in turn provides more powerful connections in the network, and so on. These strategies may involve adopting certain stances, preferences, or tastes to align with the dominant norms and values of the field. Alternatively, they may aim to undermine the established positions of their predecessors. According to Bourdieu, at the heart of the struggle within the cultural field lies a potent weapon: the legitimate definition of art, encompassing its classifications and boundaries (1996). Challenging the limiting distribution system can result in new self-support mechanisms. Multiple artist-run and off-spaces, as well as low-profile zines, can serve as examples of these alternative strategies (Dettère & Nannucci, 2012). When there are but a few dissemination opportunities available, the artists start inventing their own, with Salon des Refusés being perhaps the most prominent example. Since the XX century, self-organised platforms and self-published zines have been popping up all over the globe¹. Artists and art workers join forces to produce exhibitions and printed materials to spread their images and ideas. Often, artists have their first solo exhibitions in such small-scale off-spaces, where they are free to experiment and fail, exchange with other artists, and meet curators who could bring them to their next institutional projects². In the field of contemporary art, the struggle for a legitimate definition of art is complicated by its 'post-medium condition' (Krauss, 2000). Traditional artistic media, such as painting or sculpture, are no longer bound by their traditional constraints or definitions. Instead, artists freely mix and combine different media, techniques, and materials in their work, blurring the boundaries between them. Krauss argues that, in the post-medium condition, artists are no longer

¹ Alternative Art Guide. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://alternativeartguide.com>

² Between 2017 and 2021 I was co-leading such a platform in Ghent, called *croxhapox* which started in 1990. Many artists, both more and less famous, have had their first solo show in *croxhapox*, including 1995: Michaël Borremans; 1997: Dirk Zoete; 1998: Jan De Cock; 1999: Johan De Wilde, Anton Cotter; 2006: Tinka Pittoors; 2008: Nel Aerts, Robbert&Frank Frank&Robbert; 2009: Jan Op de Beeck, Boris Van den Eynde (Evelin Brosi, Elvis Bonier), Meggy Rustamova; 2012: Max Pinckers. Many of them recognised the trampoline-effect that such a presentation had on the development of their career.

restricted to working within the confines of a single medium or medium-specific practice. Instead, they have the freedom to explore a wide range of possibilities, often creating artworks that defy categorisation or classification based on traditional mediums. The post-medium condition marks the rupture between the paradigms of modern and contemporary art, as described by Nathalie Heinich (1998). Within the paradigm of modern art, artists sought the limits of specific media. In the paradigm of contemporary art, however, the key question is whether something is art at all. Since anything can be art, no art is taken for granted. Hence, there is increased pressure on the artist to articulate what makes her practice artistic.

Illusio, the belief in the importance of a field and acceptance of its 'rules of the game', is pivotal for the constitution of any social field and even more so for the cultural field. It is perhaps the first precondition for entering the struggle in the field of cultural production (Bourdieu, 1996). Illusio represents the deep-seated investment in a particular social field and the collective belief and engagement in the rules and objectives of the field, which agents within the field must accept to participate meaningfully. In the context of the art field, this involves recognising and valuing the specific stakes and rewards of the artistic domain, which draws agents out of their indifference and aligns them with the distinctions and values pertinent to the field. The struggles within the art field to define legitimate cultural production not only reproduce belief in the game but also reinforce the illusio, making the game itself worth playing. This collective adherence to the game's value system underpins the power of consecration, where consecrated artists and critics validate and perpetuate the sacred value of artistic works and careers, creating a cycle of mutual recognition and validation that sustains the field (Bourdieu, 1996).

In her study of the careers of contemporary Russian and Indian artists, Nataliya Komarova provides nuance to Bourdieu's theory, claiming that strong national specificities can mediate the juxtaposition (2018). In India, where there is little or no independent art scene or state support for the arts, artistic discourse is being developed thanks to private collectors, gallerists, and investors. The artists see galleries as the main drivers of their career growth and adjust the works they produce accordingly, making them more 'sellable'. They are also aware of Western views on art for commerce and adjust their narratives accordingly, underlining the priority of artistic interests. In Russia, there is a more strongly developed independent scene, including organisations supported by the state and private foundations. Artists there prefer making 'not-sellable' works and seem to be proud of it, although they are often unable to sustain their living from their practice if they earn any money at all.

In response to Bourdieu's delineation of the art field as a dualistic and two-dimensional space organised along two poles — autonomy and heteronomy on one hand and degree of

consecration on the other — Alison Gerber also proposes a more nuanced perspective that challenges the simplicity of this model (2020). Departing from the dualistic view, she emphasises the simultaneous negotiation of four types of accounts — vocational, relational, pecuniary, and credentialing — to navigate the complex terrain of contemporary art. *Vocational accounts* align with the prevailing notion that artists create out of passion, emphasising the intrinsic motivation to produce art. These accounts underscore the idea that artists engage in their craft for the love of creation, suggesting that the practice itself is a rewarding endeavour, separate from financial considerations. *Relational accounts* draw on longstanding moral arguments connecting the beautiful and the good. These accounts advocate for artistic practice benefiting society at large, emphasising its positive impact on both artists and audiences as citizens. In this context, art is viewed as a communal and societal asset, contributing to the well-being of the collective. *Pecuniary accounts* centre on narratives of investment and return, providing clear, specific, and legible explanations even to sceptical outsiders. These accounts focus on the economic aspects of art, highlighting the financial transactions, investments, and returns associated with artistic endeavours. Pecuniary accounts offer a transparent perspective on the economic dimensions of art creation. *Credentialing accounts* take an orientation toward the labour market, distinguishing themselves from the market for art objects prevalent in pecuniary accounts. These accounts focus on the professional recognition, qualifications, and credentials that contribute to an artist's standing within the labour market. Credentialing becomes a crucial aspect of navigating the art field, shaping an artist's career trajectory and opportunities. In Gerber's three-dimensional landscape, artists and artworks navigate the intricacies of these four accounts simultaneously, seeking consecration, legitimacy, and recognition within a dynamic and diverse art field.

Victoria Alexander revises Bourdieu's theory on autonomy and heteronomy. Bourdieu's original characterisation of heteronomy focused primarily on commercial pressures, neglecting the political dimensions of power dynamics within the cultural field. Alexander contends that a significant shift has occurred in the fine arts, particularly in the UK, where the autonomous sector has become increasingly influenced not only by commercial forces but also by state intervention (2018). This state intervention diminishes the autonomy of the cultural field alongside the heteronomy imposed by market forces. Similar trends are observable in Flanders, where artists, gallerists, and independent spaces often resist seeking government support due to concerns that applying for subsidies may compromise their artistic autonomy. This intersection of political and economic pressures underscores the evolving nature of autonomy and heteronomy within the contemporary cultural landscape. This theoretical insight elucidates why withdrawal from subsidised activities represents a strategic choice for maintaining autonomy.

Nathalie Heinich, Bourdieu's former student and his most ferocious critic, pointed out that field theory is too rigid and fails to account for the dynamic and diverse nature of artistic practices and the individuality of artists, emphasising the need for a more nuanced approach that recognises the fluidity and complexity of cultural and art fields. In turn, she proposed the concept of the 'triple game' which offers a nuanced framework for comprehending the multifaceted dynamics inherent in the art field. Heinich's theory delineates three interconnected levels of engagement within this milieu (1998). Firstly, the *Artistic Game* centres on the artist's creative process and the act of art production, encompassing the artist's choices, personal expression, and technical proficiency. Secondly, the *Critical Game* focuses on art criticism and the evaluation of artworks, involving scholars, critics, and institutions in interpreting and assessing artistic significance. This level fosters discussions and debates surrounding the meaning and quality of art. Lastly, the *Institutional Game* delves into the role of art institutions — such as galleries, museums, and art markets — in shaping the art field. These institutions influence the recognition, valuation, presentation, collection, and exhibition of artworks. Heinich's triple game underscores the intricate interplay between these three levels and their collective impact on the creation, dissemination, and reception of art. Consequently, artists seeking recognition must engage with all three games; failure to do so may result in invisibility within the art field. While artists striving to challenge conventional norms may encounter hurdles in gaining recognition, adept players internalise the rules to the extent that they feel liberated within the game. The strategic imperative for artists lies in navigating the dual constraints: mastering conventional norms while innovating within them, thereby adapting to the evolving landscape of art.

2.2. Navigating the art scene

Scholars have previously considered by what mechanisms artists move up in the art scene. It is worth noting that theoretical discussion of career development often implies climbing a hierarchy and achieving growth. In his conceptualisation of career advancement, Alan Bowness depicts an artist's journey towards recognition as a gradual ascent through various levels. Drawing from his experience as the director of the Tate Gallery over nine years, Bowness shared his insights in *The Conditions of Success: How the Modern Artist Rises to Fame* (1989). In this work, he introduces the notion of four distinct circles that artists must navigate to establish a successful career: their peers and fellow students, gallery owners and collectors, museums, and the broader public. A modern interpretation of these circles was provided by Heinich (2015) and Thornton (2012).

Another possible approach to looking at the strategies that artists employ when navigating the art field is through the prism of network theory. Mark Granovetter suggested that distant and occasional relationships, so-called 'weak ties', are more important in reaching new information or

receiving opportunities than 'strong ties' with friends and family members, laying the theoretical ground for the concept of the strength of weak ties (1973). It turns out that this insight is applicable in the art field as well. Braden and Teekens have researched various ways in which advantageous associations with other artists can manifest themselves (2019). Being members of the same movement or group, attending the same school, having mentor relationships, informal connections such as friendships or belonging to the same circles, receiving admiration and influence, and even being compared by critics — all these associations between more and less successful artists can enhance an artist's visibility. If a beginning artist seeks recognition, Braden and Teekens suggest in their findings that she should focus on group exhibitions with more renowned artists rather than solo exhibitions. Once established, the artist should divert her attention to fostering her position through further development of personal achievements.

Hannah Wohl's work explores a strategy centred on self-exploration (2021). Through extensive interviews with various members of the art field: emerging and established artists, collectors, gallerists, curators, and museum directors, as well as through immersion in various art events, Wohl crystallises the notion of creative visions. These visions serve as unique communication means connecting artists with other stakeholders in the art field. While in the early stages of their careers, artists can freely experiment with different styles, mediums, and themes. As they gain recognition for particular types of work, however, collectors and curators develop expectations, seeking predictability that aligns with their creative visions for the types of artworks they collect or present. Challenges may arise if an established artist decides to deviate from her typical style. Collectors and curators may still expect this artist to produce works similar to those for which she is known, potentially blocking the exploration of new artistic avenues.

2.3. Constraints for actively navigating the art field

In practice, artists experience limitations on how far they can go with the active strategies of engaging in the art field. One perspective on these limitations is formulated by Jasper Delva (2023). He underscores Bourdieu's notion of habitus as a conceptual lens, akin to glasses, shaping how individuals perceive, think, feel, evaluate, speak, and act within a given social context. Habitus is crafted through diverse social experiences such as upbringing, education, and professional engagements, becoming internalised frameworks that structure what is deemed possible or not. Delva refers to it as a 'horizon for action', emphasising its role in defining the realm of conceivable opportunities and actions³. Drawing on Cannizzo and Strong's work, Delva exemplifies how gender dynamics influence habitus, impacting the career trajectories of female film composers in Australia. Women, perceiving limited access to specific (symbolic) social networks — old boys networks —

³ See also the discussion of space of possibles above.

crucial for opportunities, are more hesitant in pursuing chances compared to their male counterparts, contributing to a self-reinforcing cycle of reduced visibility and opportunities. In essence, the circumstances and experiences within a field shape “subjective expectations of objective probabilities,” echoing Bourdieu's idea that an artist's perceived career possibilities are not purely individual but intricately interwoven with the dynamics of the field, capital, and the habitus – the very glasses through which individuals navigate their artistic journeys. This example illustrates how relationships between the field, capital, and habitus play pivotal roles in shaping career trajectories, shedding light on the nuanced interplay between habitus and social factors such as gender within the artistic domain. In contemporary Flanders, the majority of contemporary art museums and institutions are led by male directors. It was not so long ago that Jan Hoet, the first director of S.M.A.K., said that women should not be artists⁴, or his son, a prominent curator, made a statement of a similar tone⁵. A recent study from the Netherlands on the position of women artists shows data indicating that female artists receive lower income, that female graduates of fine arts education programs leave the creative sector more often than their male counterparts, and that women artists are underrepresented in museum collections (van Haeren, Sweerig, & Mariën, 2024). Focus group conversations carried out in the study confirmed that the gender and background of leaders in institutions strongly influence which artists are represented in those institutions.

Economic reality presents other limits for artists engaging in the art field. The complex economic struggles that artists face on their way to recognition are thoroughly discussed by Pierre-Michel Menger in his research on artistic labour (1999). Artists have to find their way and navigate the art field that is becoming increasingly more and more competitive. The number of contracts increases, as does the number of artists receiving job opportunities, while the number of days worked and wages decrease. Oversupply provided by the art schools and the general attractiveness of the creative profession lead to higher demands on flexibility. When in other sectors, people typically work for one employer, artists combine multiple contracts. As such, an artist has to be an entrepreneur to successfully adapt to the tapestry of employment, and multiple positions, and keep up with the administration. Oftentimes, artistic contracts only are not enough to make ends meet and even greater flexibility is required to combine artistry with a job in another field. To compensate for the absence of a single employer, the creative industries are often heavily unionised and able to negotiate collective agreements. Menger specifically mentions the performing arts sector in this regard. As of today, however, the visual arts in France lack a collective representative.

⁴ No author. (2019, March 27). Jan Hoet zei tegen mij: 'Vrouwen moeten geen kunstenaar zijn, die moeten kinderen kopen'. De Morgen. <https://www.demorgen.be/nieuws/jan-hoet-zei-tegen-mij-vrouwen-moeten-geen-kunstenaar-zijn-die-moeten-kinderen-kopen-b6beed22/?referrer=https://www.google.com/>

⁵ No author. (2019, October 26). Protestactie #smakistestil: een geluidloze schreeuw om verandering. Schamper. Retrieved from <https://www.schamper.ugent.be/daily/protestactie-smakistestil-ee-geluidloze-schreeuw-om-verandering>

In Flanders organisations such as NICC take upon the task of advocacy for correct working conditions. French legislation foresees a possibility for freelancers to get compensated for the unemployed periods as intermittent work is equated with a wage-earning position. For decades, in Belgium, there has been an 'artist status' which was transformed in January 2024 to an 'art workers' certificate' that caters for this tapestry of contracts and uncertainty of employment by providing access to basic social security to artists and art workers. Menger, in his conclusion, proposes to describe the artist's behaviour in terms of an imperfect Bayesian actor: an artist gathers information about the art field, assesses her chances, learns new skills with every new project, constantly revises them, as well as the expectations from the art field and her self-image while building networks and gaining new psychic and emotional nourishment (1999). She acts with a double set of goals: an outward-oriented goal to spread her unique artistic voice and production as far as possible, and an inward-oriented goal of self-discovery and self-actualisation.

A contemporary review of the French literary scene by Gisèle Sapiro provides useful insights into strategies for navigating the art field, challenging the simplistic division between those who can make a living out of their artistic activity and those who have to perform other activities to earn income (2019). Sapiro notes that these activities, such as teaching, editing, or translating, can be perceived as disconnected from creative work, leading to a potential denial of their connection to literary endeavours. Symbolic recognition through publications, grants, fellowships, prizes, and invitations to literary events is seen as instrumental in professionalising newcomers in the literary field. Sapiro observes that writers, once symbolically recognised, begin considering the material aspects of their profession, and the decision to fully dedicate themselves to writing often comes after gaining symbolic recognition. She emphasises how related activities offer complementary resources, confirming the professional identity of writers and addressing the tension between the necessary time for creative work and the accelerated temporality of communication in the public sphere.

In the realm of the visual arts, artists have discovered an additional avenue for generating income in applied arts by creating usable objects or undertaking graphic design commissions (Van Winkel, Gielen, & Zwaan, 2012). Traditionally, artists maintained a clear separation between their independent artistic endeavours and their 'side hustles', aimed at financial gain. The research by Van Winkel, Gielen, and Zwaan, presents a relatively recent phenomenon: the hybrid artist. This individual produces both independent artistic works and applied art objects, without making a distinction between the two in terms of value. These artists view all their creative output as an integral part of their artistic practice. This new breed of artists challenges Bourdieu's assertion that the autonomous art field represents the economic world reversed where pursuing financial gain

through art compromises an artist's authenticity and relevance (1983). According to Bourdieu, the field logic presupposes that the artists who openly use their art practice to earn a living, are perceived as commercially driven and less committed to the high art standards (1983). The hybrid artist rejects this dichotomy, valuing all her creations equally and remaining unperturbed by considerations of profitability.

2.4. Problem statement

While the literature provides a comprehensive understanding of how artists navigate the art field, the current research aims to address several remaining gaps. In the context of post-medium condition, when artists are no longer bound to specific art movements, there is a need to re-evaluate Bourdieu's field theory. Does this lack of defined movements coincide with a change in the strategies that artists employ to climb up the hierarchy of the art field?

While existing research primarily focuses on French (Bourdieu, Heinich) and Anglo-Saxon (Bowness, Wohl, Gerber) geographic and cultural contexts, this research attempts to investigate the Flemish and Brussels contexts. By doing so, the study aims to answer the question of whether the findings and theories discussed above are context-specific or rather can be applied in different local contexts. For instance, do Belgian artists develop their creative visions just as their counterparts overseas? How far does habitus account for the variation in the artists' choices of strategy?

Gerber provides valuable nuance to Bourdieu's theory by introducing different accounts that help artists navigate the art field. The current research will examine whether these accounts can be traced in the Flemish and Brussels context and if they sufficiently explain the different trajectories that beginning artists perceive in their space of possibles.

Furthermore, it will engage with Wohl's concept of creative visions and Bowness's circles of recognition, investigating how these theories apply to artists at the early stages of their careers.

Additionally, this study will investigate the dual nature of strategies employed by beginning artists, which can be categorised as either inward-oriented or outward-oriented. This dichotomy poses a challenge to Bourdieu's theory, which may not fully account for inward-oriented strategies focused on self-discovery and personal fulfilment. By exploring these inward-oriented strategies, this research aims to offer new insights that extend Bourdieu's framework.

The current thesis investigates how beginning artists establish themselves in the art field, focusing specifically on those who entered the professional art field between 2016 and 2022. Unlike more established artists who have had decades to accumulate various forms of capital — economic, cultural, social, and symbolic — beginning artists typically possess limited prestige and status. They may have economic capital inherited from their families or cultural capital derived from their formal education, but they lack the symbolic capital and reputation that comes with lengthy careers

and recognition. This group's lack of major solo exhibitions, publications, or other significant milestones makes them an intriguing subject to study, particularly regarding their career trajectories. Some may eventually become hobbyists or leave the occupation entirely, while others might continue to pursue a career in art (Van Winkel, Gielen, & Zwaan, 2012). Understanding their initial experiences and strategies can provide insights into the organisation of this particular segment of the art field.

By focusing on lived experiences, this thesis aims to provide a nuanced understanding of professionalisation processes in the art field. It will assess whether beginning artists' strategies vary according to genre and forms of capital, and how these factors influence their navigation of the art field.

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What strategies do beginning artists use to establish themselves in the art field?
2. How do these strategies manifest discursively?
3. What trajectories do beginning artists perceive in the space of possibles?
4. If there are variations in trajectories, with what characteristics are they associated (e.g., genre, forms of capital)?

3. Research design: data and method

Taking into account the topic and the objective of this study, a qualitative research method was chosen, complemented by discursive analysis and (auto)ethnography as the analytical framework. The goal of qualitative research is to identify factors that respondents themselves consider relevant: these factors guide their thoughts, emotions, and actions. This approach departs from the perspective of the respondents, and interviews are designed to ensure that the respondents have the means to reflect on how they understand reality (Roose & Meuleman, 2021). The focus on beginning artists' experiences in the art field only becomes meaningful when the significance that individuals attach to these experiences is documented.

This study follows a social constructivist paradigm, meaning it views reality as constructed through social interactions and narratives. In-depth interviews and observations provide a closer perspective on the individual's lived experiences and portray them in ethnographic sketches. This study thus aims to present a comprehensive and accurate depiction of participants' experiences.

Thanks to discursive analysis the current study examines how beginning artists articulate their strategies and navigate the art field. (Auto)ethnography further enriches this analysis by incorporating the field observations and my own experiences and reflections as a beginning artist, providing a more nuanced understanding of lived realities. This methodological combination is

well-suited for an exploration beyond surface-level observations, as it allows to uncover the underlying motivations and thoughts associated with the identity of a beginning artist.

3.1. Negotiation of access

A variety of sampling methods was employed. Since I am involved in the Flemish art sector, I addressed my network using my personal Facebook page where I have published calls for beginning artists. Several people reacted to that call: a few beginning artists whom I knew previously and whom I have interviewed as well as an established colleague whom I collaborated with in 2019. The latter suggested three names for me to contact. This first bunch of interviews delivered several other contacts with the snowball method. One interviewee I approached thanks to a mutual professional relationship. With Grounded Theory in mind, I was hunting for new perspectives watching out for a moment of saturation when every new interview presents arguments and shares thoughts that have already been noted in previous conversations. After interviewing a career-switcher I was intrigued by their story. I have also noticed that the majority of my interviewees form a homogeneous Flemish group (that is white, Dutch-speaking, with Flemish names and Flemish parents) while the population of the art schools and artistic circuit is more culturally diverse. Consequently, I launched a new call specifically looking for artists who have chosen artistry after pursuing another career and/or have a non-Flemish cultural background. This call was shared on my personal Facebook page as well as in a closed group for alumni of the art school from which I graduated. I noted that only a few of the interviewees have experience with the art market, so I reached out specifically to several old classmates and launched the third open call specifically looking for beginning artists represented by a gallery. I have also contacted several gallerists and curators from my network. The calls for participants can be found in the appendix. Every potential participant was informed through chat communication about the goal of the study, which at the time was formulated as “mapping the grey zone between in the art field and not yet in the art field”. I have also made it clear that the interviews would be done for the sole purpose of this study. Consequently, the dates and the places of the interview were negotiated.

A minor difficulty in this phase of the research appeared when artists who have been active for 10+ years reacted to the open call and claimed to be beginning artists themselves, stating they haven't achieved much recognition. A defined sampling frame addressed this difficulty, and in case those individuals did not meet the requirements, they were not interviewed.

3.2. Sampling frame

The sampling for this study was not based on random selection but rather on theoretical considerations, meaning, based on the theoretical framework, there were several criteria formulated and the artists had to fulfil them to be invited for an interview. The sampling was rather directed

towards gaining a deeper perspective into the lived experiences of beginning artists, than to achieving representativeness.

The recruitment strategy was manifold: some respondents were tipped by intermediaries, some I have addressed directly, some have reacted to my open calls, and some have been contacted using snowball sampling. The final sample consisted of 25 respondents, and a total of 25 in-depth interviews were conducted.

To be included in the sample, artists had to start their artistic endeavours between 2016 and 2022. Originally, the sample was limited to artists who started their careers between 2017 and 2022 but after fully completing the interview, two respondents reported to have commenced in 2016. After consideration, it was decided to keep the data, as the difference was negligible. Since there is no single point that defines 'the start' of an artistic career and since the research focuses on subjective experiences, the artists were asked to assess themselves when their careers started. The majority pointed to their graduation from art school as a starting point. However, for some, this was not sufficient; those who had participated in exhibitions before graduation wanted to include their exhibition history in their career duration. Those who entered the arts from other fields used different criteria to define the start of their art careers.

A total of 25 interviews were conducted, spanning locations in Ghent (15), Brugge (1), Antwerp (2), Brussels (4), and online (3). The majority of interviewees graduated from either of the two art schools in Ghent: KASK (11) or LUCA (9), one graduated from Sint-Lucas in Brussels, one was still enrolled in a program at the Academie des Beaux-Arts, and three lacked higher art education. Eight respondents explored alternative careers before transitioning to the arts, either through art education or direct development of an artistic practice. The age distribution is as follows: 10 respondents aged 20 to 29, 9 aged 30 to 39, 4 aged 40 to 49, and 2 respondents older than 50. In terms of gender representation, 16 interviewees are female, 8 male, and 1 identifies as gender fluid. Relationship status varies: 8 respondents are single, and the majority (17) are married or in a relationship. The interviewees are active in diverse artistic mediums: performing arts (1), sculpture and objects (6), collage (1), photography (4), installations (2), media art (3), painting (6), drawing (1), and textile (1). For simplicity and generalisation purposes, media descriptions were streamlined compared to the artists' nuanced self-descriptions (which included terms such as textile paintings and documentary projects). Originally, the sample was limited to artists who are based in Ghent. However, during the data collection, it became obvious that in the small country of Belgium, the distances are very short and mobility is high: some respondents have had a significant relationship with Ghent (such as studies) but have moved elsewhere. On the other hand, three respondents applied for participation without any connection to the Ghent context: after

consultation with the promoter, it was decided to drop the geographical limitation and allow for geographical variance. All respondents had attained higher education, with 10 having completed two or more different programmes.

3.3. *Data collection*

The conducted interviews followed a semi-structured format, with an initial focus on the interviewee's self-image, probing whether they identify primarily as an artist or through a specific medium, such as painting or sculpture. As the study progressed, attention shifted towards the individual's artistic journey, exploring the origins of their interest in art and the evolution of their artistic trajectory. Subsequently, the discussion delved into the interviewee's artistic practice, exploring the what and why behind their creative output. Moving from introspection to an outward perspective, artists were prompted to articulate their understanding of the art field they inhabit. Practical and financial inquiries followed this exploration. Additionally, I introduced a case study featuring Magnus Resch and his initiative to develop an app fostering transparency in the art market. Noticing distinctions made by artists between nonprofit and commercial art realms, a second case study comparing top gallery artists with top participants in art biennials and Documenta was included. The interviews lasted for 1-2 hours and were paired with extensive observation of their surroundings whenever possible. The majority of the interviews were conducted in the artists' studios, one took place in a cafe, one at my home, one at the interviewee's non-artistic workplace, one at the artist's home (due to the nature of their practice these artists did not need a specific workshop space), and three took place online due to practical constraints. The interviews were conducted in one of the languages that I speak and the participants are most comfortable with: Dutch, English, or Russian. This allowed the participants to focus on what they wanted to say and not as much on how to put it in words. When quoting interviews conducted in non-English languages, I will provide an English translation. All the participants were interviewed on the premise of anonymity, so whenever I quote someone's words, I refer to the code name the participant had chosen. Note that some participants had chosen numbers or letters to designate their code names.

The interviews concluded with a post-interview survey designed to glean insights into the interviewee's habitus. This survey was strategically presented at the end to avoid influencing earlier responses. The survey asked about grant and award history, exhibition history and aspirations, number of books owned as an indicator of cultural capital, number of artworks by other artists owned as an indicator of social capital, and demographic characteristics (age, gender, education, marital status, etc.). Interviews were conducted between June 2022 and September 2023.

In addition to the interviews, various other sources enriched the study. The podcast "The Jealous Curator" contributed valuable insights, complemented by my own experiences as a "young aspiring artist," curator, and member of the jury in the commission for subsidies under the Flemish Arts Decree, all documented in field notes. Acknowledging my position within the art field, it would be unwise to disregard my inherent biases. Instead, it is crucial to embrace this awareness, recognising how my encounters with power dynamics shape the analysis of interviews. My informed and interested insider status contributes to the thoroughness with which I conduct this study and allows me to use introspection as a valuable source of first-hand material for analysis. My main conversation partners are people who, like me, are entering the power field through various entry points and discovering the unknown waters of the art field bit by bit. This insider perspective on the ongoing struggle between autonomy and heteronomy within the art field provided compelling insights throughout the analysis.

3.4. *Data analysis*

The analysis utilised TAMSA Analyzer, a specialised qualitative analysis software application enabling the coding and organisation of codes into families. Following Grounded Theory principles, the analysis design was adjusted for efficiency and logistical ease. Traditionally, Grounded Theory involves starting with no prior knowledge, conducting interviews, and iteratively progressing through cycles of interview and analysis to build the theory (Mortelmans, 2013). In this study, all interviews were collected before analysis. To simulate optimal conditions, interviews were grouped into sets based on the art schools attended by respondents, aligning to collect interviews in specific locations, such as art schools.

One set of LUCA alumni was all connected through a shared studio space. The other LUCA alumni were included in the second set. The third set comprised KASK alumni aged 25-30, and the fourth set consisted of KASK alumni older than 35 years old. The fifth set consisted of people who graduated from other schools.

The analysis began with the open coding of 5 interviews, resulting in approximately 200 codes after analysing five interviews. These codes were then organised into several axes, such as different roles that other artists play in one's career, and names of organisations were grouped according to their type — gallery, museum, artist-run. The open and axial coding process was repeated for the next four sets of interviews, with new codes placed horizontally or nested within existing code families. By the end of axial coding for the fifth set, over 20 axes emerged: descriptions of roles within the art field, mechanisms influencing career development, barriers to progression, active and selective involvement, strategies, relationships between time and resources, and reflections on the role of arts and artists.

During selective coding, all axes and codes were organised into three major groups: static descriptions of the art field, mechanisms influencing mobility within it, and a group of codes reflecting the artist's mindset, experience in the art field, and overall reflections on the dynamics at play.

Subsequently, I shifted my focus to the last code family, identifying codes related to strategies for navigating the art field. I systematically organised the codes into two discernible groups: inward-oriented strategies encompassing active participation in the art field and outward-oriented strategies involving strategic withdrawal. Notably, roughly half of the interviewees made a distinction between independent non-profit circuits and commercial circuits, often choosing more inward- or outward-oriented strategies for each domain. I then performed a cross-tabulation analysis, which unravelled four distinct trajectories of navigating the art field perceived by artists. One trajectory signifies a stance rather withdrawn from both the non-profit circuit and the art market, another is enthusiastically seeking opportunities in both the art market and non-profit segments, the third open is focused on collaborations with platforms in the independent non-profit circuit, and, finally, the fourth revolves around galleries as commercial actors and is more withdrawn from the independent actors.

Both inductive and deductive methods were applied in this work: on one hand, the data was treated by Grounded Theory, to develop the theory from the original data, and on the other hand, the arsenal of theoretical concepts informed the later stages of analysis.

3.5. Ethics

During the whole research, ethical considerations were taken into account: this study aims to get almost an intimate insight into the thought and decision-making process of individuals. Their privacy and serene atmosphere during the interview were stipulated as a basic precondition to developing trust. Each interview began with an introduction of informed consent, the goals of the study and the rights of the interviewee, guaranteeing that their participation was both informed and voluntary. An example of the informed consent form can be found in the appendix.

Since the respondents were sharing personal data and opinions that they otherwise might not share with an undisclosed group of people, their identity was protected through anonymization of transcripts. Respondents' names were replaced with self-chosen pseudonyms and any information that could potentially identify a participant was omitted. In reporting the findings, respondents will be referred to by the chosen pseudonyms to maintain their confidentiality.

Data (including audio files and transcripts) were stored confidentially, as mentioned in the informed consent. Audio recordings were anonymised and saved on a personal laptop, secured with a personal login and password, ensuring that only I had access to the data. The recordings were

stored as m4a and WAV files, and the transcripts as RTF text files on the same laptop. Transcripts were analysed using TAMSAnalyzer, and the project files from TAMSAnalyzer were also stored securely on the personal laptop. Data can be made accessible to the research supervisor if necessary which was also explained in the informed consent document.

Audio recordings were captured using a voice recorder application on a personal smartphone and — as a backup — a recorder device Zoom H5. After each interview, the recordings were transferred to the personal laptop via AirDrop technology. Data will be retained until the final defence of this thesis. After the requirement to retain data has ended, the data will be deleted. Once the thesis is successfully defended, the findings based on the data will be made publicly accessible. This thesis will be available through the university's digital repository.

3.6. Researcher positionality

It is crucial to make my position as a researcher in this study clear. I presented myself primarily as a sociology student during interviews as I wanted to minimise the potential influence from my personal experiences as both an artist and an arts organiser. Some interviewees were acquainted with me, but they were not fully aware of my specific roles within the art community, and I refrained from disclosing details that could bias their responses.

During the semi-structured interviews, I maintained enthusiastic and attentive behaviour. Conversations would flow, allowing an organic deep exploration of topics marked by the prepared questions. Now and then I would drop some remarks to show that I have knowledge of the key actors in the field. This allowed me to establish rapport and credibility, enabling interviewees to focus on nuanced aspects of their experiences without remaining superficial.

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) underline reflexivity in sociology and encourage researchers to critically examine their positions and biases. Considering this framework, I must acknowledge the influence of my position on the research process. As an active member of the art field, I am biased by my interpretation of *illusio*. Occasionally, I felt internal judgments or expectations during interviews. These insights, explored through auto-ethnography, provide valuable reflexivity for understanding how my perspectives and assumptions may influence data collection and analysis. While the recognition of these biases can place me as a researcher in a vulnerable position, I rather maintain that critical examination of these dynamics ensures the integrity and validity of the research findings.

This reflexive approach underscores my commitment to ethical research practices, transparency in methodology, and sensitivity to the complexities of researching within a community to which I am personally connected.

4. Findings

4.1. Inward- and outward-oriented strategies

What kind of strategies can an artist use to navigate the art field? From the point of view of the artist, there is a choice between inward- and outward-directed strategies. The first are more passive and self-centred: the artists avoid certain actors and focus on self-development and personal practice. The second are rather active and outreaching: the artist consciously reaches out to the other actors in the art field. Navigating the art field then implies a combination of these 'pull' and 'push' strategies, manoeuvring between various tensions, such as pressures from the art market, public reception concerns, limited resources, and the desire to be autonomous in all artistic decisions.

Bourdieu's field theory examines the positions of actors within the field, focusing on how these relative positions shape strategies and actions (1984). It proves useful to explain the rationale of some individual strategies but it seems to be easier to relate it to outward-oriented strategies than to those directed inward. The triple game framework can explain the necessity for both inward- and outward-oriented strategies on the individual level to effectively navigate the complexities of artistic recognition and success (Heinich, 1998). That is the artistic game, the first one to take place, happens in the artist's workshop and mind, while the critical and institutional games involve other participants in the art field.

Empirical evidence from this study shows that young artists often oscillate between these strategies. At times, they must actively assert themselves and seek visibility in the art field, while at other times, they withdraw and prioritise their personal artistic growth and practice. This dual approach enables them to navigate the complexities of the field.

The main outward-oriented strategy that the beginning artists referred to is achieving name recognition: *Maar goed, eens dat ze je naam daar kennen, eens je mee doet aan een wedstrijd, dan kom je op een bepaalde lijst terecht en wordt vaak opgetrommeld om een werk te tonen. En dat voel ik wel, dat ik daar nu meer en meer, misschien wel een beetje, bij begin te horen (Anyway, once they know your name there, once you enter a competition, you end up on a certain list and are often called upon to show a work. And I do feel that I am now starting to belong to that more and more, perhaps even a little) (Rogier)*. It corresponds to various theoretical frames. From the perspective of field theory, gaining name recognition means the acquisition of symbolic capital, when the people whom the artist values start to value the artist (Bourdieu, 1996). The theory of weak ties implies that a higher number of weak connections, such as having participated in the same exhibition with more known artists, having been featured in art magazine articles and so on, helps the artist to achieve even more recognition in the long-term perspective (Braden & Teekens, 2019). The theory

of circles of recognition also implies that recognition accumulates, allowing the artists to trespass from one circle up to the next (Bowness, 1989). Additionally, various other outward-oriented strategies have emerged in the empirical material, including networking, engaging in conversations about one's practice at public events, and establishing connections with gatekeepers, thereby ensuring decision-makers are acquainted with the artist's portfolio and activities. Another strategy involves leveraging relationships with more seasoned artists, often by serving as their assistants or collaborators. Furthermore, some artists strategically attract projects aligned with their artistic vision, employing curated communication on social media platforms and meticulously controlling the discourse surrounding their work. Maintaining visibility through activities such as exhibitions, participation in open calls, and organising independent events also play a significant role in career advancement. Notably, for individuals transitioning into the arts, enrolling in formal education programs provides access to valuable networks within the artistic community, with instructors often serving as advocates and facilitating opportunities for professional growth. These proactive measures collectively contribute to artists' strategic positioning within the competitive landscape of the art field.

Not all the strategies that artists employ are directed towards the art field. In some instances, advancing in one's career may require stepping back to reflect and focus on personal growth. The current research reveals a spectrum of inward-oriented strategies, which, upon closer examination, emerge as pragmatic responses to the complexities of artistic career development. These strategies may initially appear counterintuitive but demonstrate logical coherence upon deeper analysis. Examples include 'strategic withdrawal,' where artists abstain from certain aspects of the art field or market to preserve limited resources and prioritise personal objectives. Another strategy is 'selectivity,' where artists establish criteria guiding their decisions regarding applications and project participation. Artists also embrace the notion of 'realistic ambitions,' deliberately avoiding excessive pursuit of fame or monetary gain to preserve the limited resources they have and their psychological well-being. Additionally, artists endeavour to 'develop their artistic language,' seeking uniqueness in mediums, methodologies, and thematic explorations. They also emphasise the importance of 'creating new work' across diverse media to avoid stagnation and 'producing quality work' that satisfies personal standards before public presentation. The pursuit of freedom and autonomy stands out as a notable inward-oriented strategy, involving the navigation of circumstances to facilitate independent decision-making and shield against external commercial pressures or public reception

concerns⁶. These strategies offer insights into addressing the inherent constraints of career progression within the art field, as discussed above. Theoretically, these strategies underscore the prolonged nature of artistic career trajectories, akin to a marathon rather than a sprint. Success in the art field is not a singular achievement but a continuous journey marked by incremental advancements and setbacks. Consequently, artists must cultivate self-awareness and prioritise physical and psychological well-being to endure their artistic pursuits.

Some strategies may show strong similarities. Attracting the right projects as an outward-oriented strategy corresponds with selectivity as an inward-oriented one. The main difference between the two is the attitude: attracting the right projects is an active approach to various actions to get the desirable kinds of invitations and commissions, while selectivity is a retractive strategy of not accepting an invitation, not applying for an open call with too little professional appearance etc.

Table 1 provides an overview of the strategies which emerged from the empirical evidence. They are organised in two big groups: outward- and inward-oriented strategies. Every respondent uses a combination of these strategies of their 'arsenal': using the ones from one group does not ban usage of the other group at all. On the contrary, it is rather the case that to navigate the art field, the artists use both push and pull strategies, actively searching for some people or projects and consciously avoiding others.

Bowness (1989) distinguishes between the non-commercial art world and the art market: artists supplying the market he called journeymen, while those whose works fill museums he would refer to as artistic geniuses. In the podcast "The Jealous Curator," a conversation between artists Daniella Krysa and Petah Coyne highlighted this distinction. Coyne, acting as a coach and adviser, asked Krysa, "Do you aspire to be a gallery artist or a museum artist?" Krysa's firm desire to become a museum artist profoundly influenced her practice after that interview took place. This dialogue echoes Bowness's differentiation between artists regarded as geniuses and those seen as journeymen. The traditional view aligns with empirical evidence, as artists interviewed in this study

⁶ This excerpt from my observation diary illustrates the tension between personal standards and public standards. *"In how far do I and should I take into account the reception of the work I make? Last week I had a conversation about whether or not to compromise the form of my work to make it acceptable by the public. It is a participatory work about Belgian national identity. I develop a ceremony/ritual to (re-)initiate old and new Belgians into their Belgian-ness. I want people to come and experience the happening and gain some new perspectives on what's uniting all of them across the cultural and demographic differences. As an artist I want to introduce a kind of Citizenship Day or Citizenship Celebration, which seems to be a very delicate issue in a state where national identity is defined through denial of this identity's existence. So in this climate one needs to be careful not to trigger a discussion that leads to even more polarisation. If I am to convey my own political stance in the ceremony, it has to be done in a very subtle or even subversive way. It would be wrong though to sterilise the work before it had seen the light of day or had received a proper review by the public servants who would be to execute it but on some human level it is very tempting. When I feel this temptation, I am inclined to think in such terms as: what would be suitable? What would people recognise? What should I avoid? On the contrary, when I want to guarantee the integrity of the work my thought process is different. I ask: what would be conceptually right to do? What would work here? How to create dramaturgical tension? How to come to a release? When placing the integrity of the work as the highest value, the creation process just happens on another level."*

Tabel 1: Overview of the outward- and inward-oriented strategies

Outward-oriented strategies	Inward-oriented strategies
<p>1. networking: visiting public events where other artists and gatekeepers are present, having conversation about one's practice</p> <p>2. connecting with the gatekeepers: a variety of actions that lead to decisionmakers be aware of the artist's existence and her practice, from simply reaching out by e-mail to applying for a job as an assistant to an artist or to a gallery</p> <p>3. connecting with the more experienced artists: by, for example, working as an assistant to other successful artists</p> <p>4. attracting right projects: some artists are cautious about giving a direction to the kind of projects they want to be participating in by being selective, by "curated communication" on social media and by controlling the discourses about their work, by curating one's portfolio</p> <p>5. informing the public: artists send out newsletters, update their social media feeds in order to keep their followers up to date about their new projects or artworks</p> <p>6. name recognition: working towards having one's name known in the circuits, by for example exhibiting one's works</p> <p>7. participating in open calls: applying for exhibitions, various kinds of projects by sending one's proposal, open calls can be free or paid,</p> <p>8. organising events on one's own: when there are little chances to present one's work or little access to crucial gatekeepers, one can take initiative to present her own work and/or that of the other artists</p> <p>9. enrolling in a formal education programme: by enrolling to an art school people get access to forming networks of like-minded artists and curators, their teachers are usually themselves active as curators, art organisers or artists and can become their advocates</p>	<p>1. strategic withdrawal: artists do not participate in certain parts of the art field or art market or in certain activities, by means of preserving the limited resources and focussing on their own priorities</p> <p>2. selectivity: artists develop their own set criteria based on which they decide where to send application or in what project to participate</p> <p>3. freedom and autonomy: navigating the circumstances in such a way as to be able to make choices free from outside influence: for example, commercial influence from the galleries or likability of the work by the public</p> <p>4. keeping ambitions realistic: artists not overly strive to get fame or earn money, formulate goals that are within reach or do not think in terms of goals at all, so as to preserve the limited resources and protect themselves</p> <p>5. develop own artistic language: find the medium, the way of working in that medium, the topic or theme which are essentially unique</p> <p>6. make new work: avoid being trapped in one specific medium by continuously creating works in different media</p> <p>7. make good work: the artist has to be content with their production before the work leaves the workshop</p>

also differentiate between the non-profit art field and the commercial art market. However, most interviewees did not regard museums as part of the independent circuits, but rather as distinct entities. From the perspective of field theory, in almost any other field acquiring higher economic capital means climbing a position higher in the field hierarchy. In the art field, however, the struggle for autonomy posed the doxa of art for art's sake, which problematizes the artist's relation to the art market. It is more prestigious to be a starving genius than a well-selling artist. This doxa marks the distinction between the field of restricted production and the field of mass audience production (Bourdieu, 1983). The impact of this belief was tangible in the empirical materials as well, as the interviewees primarily expressed vocational motives for creating art. Sometimes they distrusted the art market in as much as only referring to it with inward-oriented strategies, prioritising self-development over participation in discredited commercial activities.

The artists interviewed for this study experience different spaces of possibles (Bourdieu, 1996): what kind of institutions, organisations, and key figures are within reach for them, what kind of strategies can they use, and in what context. Four possible trajectories were identified: withdrawal from commercial and non-profit segments, active engagement with both, and exclusive involvement in either one of the segments. The trajectory of withdrawal means prioritising inward-oriented strategies over outward-oriented ones concerning both commercial and non-profit segments. Active participation trajectory manifests through the expression of outward-oriented strategies with the art field in general, and both commercial and non-profit segments in particular. And when artists appeal to selective trajectories they tend to refer to outward-oriented strategies in one segment and take upon a more withdrawn, inward-oriented posture concerning the other. It is important to note that all the interviewees do refer to both outward- and inward-oriented strategies; the distinction between the four trajectories is made based on the recurring references to specific strategies concerning the art field and its segments. This study handles the trajectories as the units of analysis. While the individual artists might reference one trajectory at one point in an interview and switch to another later, this did not occur often.

This framework offers a nuanced understanding of how artists navigate the art field early in their careers. It suggests that emerging artists may not follow a traditional linear trajectory of recognition, as suggested by circles of recognition theory. Instead, they may focus on specific segments of the art field or choose to engage with both, employing various strategies as they navigate the complexities of the art field in pursuit of recognition and artistic freedom.

In what follows, I present an (auto)ethnographic report of these four distinguished trajectories. The observed group occupies a similar position in the art field: limited economic capital and no symbolic capital, with slight variations in social and cultural capital. Given the

homogeneity of these artists' positions, traditional field theory analysis offers limited insights. Instead, the strength of this study lies in its focus on this specific segment and its in-depth exploration. I have chosen ethnographic analysis as the most suitable method for this purpose because it allows a nuanced, detailed examination of the lived experiences and strategic choices of these artists. This approach captures the complexities of their trajectories, providing a richer understanding of their navigation through the art field.

4.2. *Withdrawal trajectory*

I visited Lia on a sunny spring day; it wasn't quite summer yet but warm enough to hold our conversation outside in her garden. That garden is located between her house and a separate building where her workshop is located. She led me through the living room on the ground floor where I noticed a rather decorated interior, before she gave me a tour of her spacious workplace. At the time she was working on a series of small-format paintings created in collaboration with artificial intelligence. They were lying on the desk at the end of the studio building. The paintings featured a female figure and birds, there were multiple variations of the same motif, and the brush strokes were very precise. Elsewhere in the workshop, there were larger works neatly hanging on the wall or standing on the floor. All of them would feature either female silhouettes or birds, or maybe both. There was a separate desk by the window with boxes and instruments, and in the nice weather, it felt like a refuge where Lia could engage with her imagination and happily spend hours. The house itself is located in a green residential area, which only adds to the feeling of tranquillity and ease.

Lia teaches painting in an art class at a part-time art academy, and during her classes, she works on her oeuvre inviting the students to keep up with her tempo. She confided that in this way, she is constantly working on her oeuvre and does not have to divide the time between money-earning and creativity. She did not have projects in running, and on multiple occasions during the interview she would express a strong aversion towards the art field: *Ik heb daar een enorme walging bij die wereld, ik vind dat verschrikkelijk, dat netwerken en die ego's zijn verschrikkelijk. Ik vind dat verschrikkelijk. (I have an enormous disgust for that world, I find it terrible, the networking and those egos are terrible. I find it terrible.)* She has several artist friends who participate in networking, by visiting events, and talking to people there, but Lia would not be able to do that, for her, it would feel like prostituting herself. Another friend of hers is a curator, who works in a museum and participates in different acquisition committees, but Lia would never ask that friend to look at her work, because it would feel to her as if she was abusing their friendship. How would she imagine her career to work then? *Ik denk dat het nu naar mij moet komen. (I think it*

has to come to me now). This statement raises a fundamental question: why do some artists feel the need to withdraw entirely from both the commercial and non-profit segments of the art field?

Several respondents would sometimes retract to this tortoise-like trajectory of navigating the art field: they close themselves up inside their workshops, focus on the experience of the creation, on developing their visual language etc. and avoid networking and reaching out to relevant figures who might be able to improve their relative position in the art field. Why do artists sometimes choose to withdraw from the art field altogether, without making a difference between independent circuit or commercial segment? Or how does this withdrawal trajectory appear in their space of possibles? At first, this discourse seemed somewhat counter-intuitive to me. What is the point of making art, if you do not have a desire to grow, to show it to more people, to earn more to be able to make more intricate works? From a reflexive point of view, it is clear that this judgement is shaped by my habitus. After having been organising events to give chances to aspiring artists, so that their work would be seen by those who can help them further on their way up, I came to believe that this was the only possible way of leading one's life as an artist. However, Lia and some others have presented a different way of looking at things.

In Duif's workshop, there was only one chair, so he kindly invited me to sit and fetched some kind of self-made bricolage object as seating for himself. On the walls, against the walls, on a self-made construction in the middle of the room, and on the floor there were rather large canvases, at least 80 cm long. I realised I saw his work in an independent art space in Brussels a few weeks ago. The more I looked around, the more details I could see: some small postcard-format sketches hanging on a column, some aluminium shapes hanging on another wall, and tubes and cans of paint, ... It is a large space on the ground floor of a factory building, the windows are small, it doesn't look like there is heating in winter, and during the interview a fire alarm goes off for no reason, forcing us to continue the conversation in a small garden, the temperature dropping to chilliness and the voices accompanied by a dreamcatcher.

Duif works 4 days a week as an art handler, which provides enough income to sustain himself. At least two evenings during the working week and at least two days at the weekend he comes to the workshop, and something must change there, no matter how big or small the change might be. A week after the interview he and his gallerist participated in Art Rotterdam, one of the biggest art fairs around. Despite his works being shown in both commercial and independent spaces, the discourse that Duif referred to several times during the interview was very similar to Lia's: *Ik ben niet iemand wie actief op zoek gaat naar iets of vragen stelt of voorstellen maakt of zo, want dat is niet zo mijn stijl. Mijn stijl was altijd meer van wat er op mij afkwam en dan is er iets mee gebeurd. (I'm not someone who actively looks for something or asks questions or makes*

proposals or something like that, because that's not my style. My style was always more about what came to me and then something would happen with it.)

Having or not having an active involvement in the art scene does not have an impact on opting for the withdrawal trajectory. Aversion towards 'selling' oneself, and being 'entrepreneurial' has also been mentioned by Katrien, a career-switcher who came to the arts after decades of journalism. She kept the drive to tell the stories, but now she wants to do it on her terms, through the medium of sonic experiences and audio narratives. Another artist — No — who has moved from one city to another, and started working in a bar, experienced a conflict of agendas: her working hours usually coincide with the social happenings, when one could engage in networking. She also gave up a collective atelier and with that lost connection to other beginning artists, which again contributed to the feeling of isolation: *Ik heb daar absoluut geen connectie mee (I have no connection with it)*. Flint, Renata, Masha 3, Ekaterina, Медведь (Medved) all have no projects in running. Flint has a full-time job and there is too little time left for creativity. Renata is engaged in volunteering, helping Ukrainian artists and art workers fleeing from the war, and studies and doesn't feel ready yet to actively participate. Masha 3 has no artistic training and network and struggles to find a connection with the art field. Ekaterina has moved to another city to work as a press photographer and lost some of her connections with the art field, the job is very time-consuming and due to personal reasons she stopped the intensive projects she had before, and so she had few engagements *omdat de bal niet rolt (because "the ball isn't rolling")*. Медведь was studying Slavistics full-time and dreaming about finishing it and dedicating time to reinventing her practice. Yet they all are identifying as artists, having the aspiration to continue active participation in the future. They just don't know yet how it will work out exactly.

There are various reasons why artists might adopt a withdrawal strategy. It could be due to their character, lack of ongoing projects, being excluded from networks, or not having access to them in the first place. What's typical in this trajectory is that when asked about their dreams and aspirations for the future — assuming everything they desired would happen — artists often express a desire to continue working on their practice just as they do now, without 'wishing for much'⁷. This trajectory serves an important practical purpose: preserving resources and prioritising their artistic work. Beginning artists often face challenging working conditions, such as inadequate heating in

⁷ The degree of surprise that I've experienced when hearing this position and the slight judgement that I felt when the interviewees did not tell me that they would like to, for example, have more projects in museums, to have international presence, to make it into the art history books, perhaps says more about my own bias. The way I was socialised, having a big dream or ambition is a part of a conscious strategy to participate in the power struggle in the art field. At the same time, consciously striving for fame or money can contaminate one's practice. If the artist chooses this way, her oeuvre is often discarded as not pure enough. But having no ambition and wishing to continue doing what the artist does at the moment of the interview, seemed overly modest and almost counterproductive. I silently wondered how they really see it: do they really not want to present their work in more and more professional contexts, to evolve in their métier and produce more complex and expensive works, do they not need these new stimuli that you get from working in different cultural contexts?

their workshops or having to work in their bedrooms due to high rent prices and material costs. Engaging in networking activities is emotionally demanding. Many artists report that working on their practice brings them joy and fulfilment (Siongers, J., Van Steen, A., & Lievens, 2016). Given limited emotional resources and time, it's reasonable for them to choose activities that replenish rather than drain them. Returning to Lia's tranquil workshop, it becomes clear that her withdrawal is not an escape but a deliberate choice to prioritise her artistic integrity. By stepping away from both the commercial and non-profit segments, Lia and artists like her highlight a critical tension in the art field: the struggle between external pressures and personal creative fulfilment.

On the other hand, during the initial phase of their careers, artists must develop their artistic voice and style — the creative vision, as Wohl calls it (2021). Prioritising this development before venturing into the competitive art field makes sense. The trajectory of withdrawal thus underscores the importance of personal artistic development over external validation. For many artists, the initial phase of their careers is best spent sharpening their creative vision. They need to be free from the pressures of the competitive art market. This choice, while it might seem counterintuitive, serves to preserve their artistic freedom and psychological well-being.

What characteristics are associated with withdrawal trajectory? The artists who appeal to this trajectory seem to possess the biggest cultural capital (together with a selective independent trajectory) if measured by the number of books in possession and by the number of diplomas of higher education. They tend to work in more recent mediums, such as performance, media art, and installation. Generally, these artists tend to be older than the other groups, so it is possible to suggest they had more time to become disengaged. Out of all of the interviewees, the majority of people who have immigrated to Belgium from another country chose the withdrawal strategy. The absence of a local support network of close friends from youth, and cultural differences that need to be bridged in the process of assimilation, reduce their social and cultural capital.

4.3. Active participation trajectory

The artists who follow the withdrawn trajectory often wonder how others are doing it. Some of them confided in me with a slightly disapproving tone about having friends who strategically go to all the openings and events to engage in networking. Katrien wondered: *Ik snap het eigenlijk niet hoe dat sommige mensen het doen, maar overal altijd aanwezig te zijn en hebben die mij gezien en hebben die mij gezien... Maar misschien, ik weet niet, misschien zie ik dat verkeerd. (I don't understand how some people do it: always be present everywhere and have those people seen me and have they seen me... But maybe, I don't know, maybe I'm seeing that wrong.)* On the other hand, Masha 3 would not at all mind joining the social happening but in the lack of social capital, she questions: *Мне, конечно, хотелось иногда, я думаю, блин, где же они все тусуются? Как*

же мне пойти их всех найти? (Of course, sometimes I wanted to think, damn, where do they all hang out? How can I go find them all?) So I was curious, too, what kind of people are they, those who reportedly go to all the events, make themselves seen. How do they narrate their careers?

Right at the heart of Ghent, close to one of the oldest churches, I rang the doorbell, and GS let me in. We had to follow a sequence of corridors and stairs until we got to her workshop: two little rooms on one side and a kitchen on the other. One room is dedicated to 'dirty work' with the raw materials, while in the other there is a computer desk and a little library. In the building next door, GS tells me, there is a large workshop of one of the most prominent artists of the whole country who had represented Belgium in a prestigious biennial. GS's parents didn't allow her to study arts, so she studied furniture design first. However, she felt incarcerated learning an applied discipline, she longed for creative freedom as if she could not do without it. Her family has a rule that only a certain amount of study years would be paid for by the parents, so when she had to pay for her studies herself she decided to study fine arts. In the end, she had to combine a part-time job with a part-time education. When we met, she worked as a cleaning lady and was acquiring a teacher's diploma. I have seen her work in some contexts that seemed dubious and semi-amateur to me, and her sculptures stood out to me. GS told me that she used to apply for all open calls and contests, once she organised an exhibition herself, carefully inviting the key curators, etc.: *ik moet alle die kansen grijpen en hogere kansen grijpen. (I have to grab all those opportunities and grab higher opportunities.)*

It is important to 'get your ball rolling', once you have one project, there you plant a seed for future opportunities, because you meet people there, who can play a role in your future development⁸. For GS it worked like this: *Bijvoorbeeld, twee jaar geleden had ik mee gedaan aan een kunstwedstrijd euhm in Kortrijk hoe noemt dat nu weer, Stimulaar, en daar waren er heel wat*

⁸ Exhibitions provide new chances, almost half of the artists whom I have talked to have used the expression 'the ball has to roll' or alike. When you have one project, it triggers another one which leads to another one and so on.

Een tentoonstelling zie ik als van een katalysator van nieuwe kansen. Ik toon mijn werk, mensen zien dat en daar en dan uh komt eigenlijk. Tot nu toe is dat vrijwel altijd zo geweest dat na een tentoonstelling er mensen zijn geweest die dat gezien hebben en die dan een andere vraag hebben: ik heb een tentoonstelling hier en hier en ik zou graag jouw werk daar willen tonen. Ja, je gooit een steen in het water en daar komen dan kringetjes uit. Het is super belangrijk voor mij dat mijn tentoonstelling op punt staat. Dat dat er staat zoals ik wil dat dat er staat. En ik kan niet mij veroorloven om dat slecht te laten uitzien alleen maar omdat ik niet het budget heb gekregen. Ik ga daar de consequenties van voelen. Als het niet is waar ik achtersta ga ik me daar slecht over voelen ten eerste en het gaat ook niet werken. (I see an exhibition as a catalyst for new opportunities. I show my work, people see that and there and then uh actually comes. Until now it has almost always been the case that after an exhibition there have been people who have seen it and who then have a different question: I have an exhibition here and here and I would like to show your work there. Yes, you throw a stone into the water and circles come out. It is super important to me that my exhibition is ready. That it looks the way I want it to look. And I can't afford to make that look bad just because I didn't get the budget. I'm going to feel the consequences of that. If it's not what I support, first of all I'm going to feel bad about it and it's not going to work either.) (23)

This expression illustrates how individual artists perceive the struggle for recognition, as it is conceptualised in the field theory. The more recognition you have, the more symbolic capital you have, the higher your position is in the field and the more expensive, complex projects you are offered in more prestigious institutions. However, little empirical evidence was found that individual artists perceive the circles of recognition with specific sequential order, as been described by Bowness (1989), Heinich (2015), or Thornton (2012).

curatoren, omdat door corona was het niet open voor het publiek de eerste weekend, of de openingsavond was enkel zo curatoren en professionelen die daar waren en toen had ik wel zowat connecties en gesproken over mijn werk. (For example, two years ago I participated in an art competition, erm in Kortrijk, what is it called, Stimulaar, and there were a lot of curators there, because due to corona it was not open to the public the first weekend, or the opening evening was only so curators and professionals who were there and then I almost had connections and talked about my work.)

So it seems that an unapologetic mentality of taking all the chances whichever presents itself is the main drive of this trajectory. For those who chose a withdrawal strategy, this seems to be a problematic, if not opportunistic, attitude, while those who build their career by grabbing chances refer to other motivations. In the case of GS, it was an almost existential need to create art.

Another artist whom I met showcases a special case of career development: 25⁹ did not study fine arts but product design. He worked several years in the design industry and at some point started to create personal work, just for himself. This work caught the attention of one of the biggest curators in Ghent (who, by coincidence — or not — primarily works with white male Flemish artists), who presented it in a small show, after which 25 started collaborating with one of the prominent Ghent gallerists. For him, too, the main drive is passion that brings people — whether artists, curators, or gallerists, — together: *Elke kunstenaar die succesvol was maakte wel deel uit van een bepaald belangrijk netwerk [...] deel uit een groter geheel, een netwerk van gepassioneerde kunstenaars en ja, dat is belangrijk, dat is gewoon echt belangrijk om mensen te leren kennen en het is soms ontmoeting en een beetje te sturen. (Every successful artist was part of a certain important network [...] part of a larger whole, a network of passionate artists and, yes, that is important, that is just really important to get to know people, and sometimes it takes a meeting and a bit of directing.)*

Duif and Lia prefer the art field to come to them, but 25 would not agree with them: *Het is heel zeldzaam dat iemand out of the blue ontdekt wordt zonder zelf moeite te moeten doen en mensen te leren kennen. Je moet ermee bezig zijn, maar het is ook fijn om ermee bezig te zijn. Zo leer je mensen kennen die achter je werk staan, die erin geloven en kansen en mogelijkheden bieden. Ik denk dat elke belangrijke persoon die mij een stap vooruit heeft geholpen, het resultaat is van ontmoetingen die ik zelf grotendeels heb gefaciliteerd of waarvoor ik heb gezorgd. Er is weinig gebeurd waar ik niet zelf op heb aangestuurd, waarvoor ik geen setting heb gecreëerd om het mogelijk te maken. Bijvoorbeeld, voor het GUM¹⁰ heb ik bij de oprichting van het museum een e-*

⁹ Several artists have chosen numbers as their pseudonyms: 25, 24E, 667705 and 23.

¹⁰ Ghent University Museum, Marjan Doom is its director.

mail gestuurd naar Marjan Doom, waarin ik heel gepassioneerd was over haar museum. Dat is echt waarmee ik bezig ben of wat me boeit. Zo is er een duurzame relatie ontstaan. Het is gewoon belangrijk. (It is very rare that someone is discovered out of the blue without having to make an effort and getting to know people. You have to work on it, but it is also nice to work on it. This way you get to know people who support your work, who believe in it and offer opportunities and possibilities. I think that every important person who has helped me move forward has been the result of meetings that I largely facilitated or arranged for myself. Little has happened that I did not direct myself, for which I did not create a setting to make it possible. For example, for the GUM (Ghent University Museum), when the museum was founded, I sent an email to Marjan Doom, saying I was very passionate about her museum. That's really what I'm doing or what fascinates me. This is how a lasting relationship was created. It's just important.)¹¹

When I asked GS and 25, what would their career look like if everything that they wanted to happen did work out just in the way they wanted, both of them answered that they would like to show their work in museums, whether Belgian or international. For Seishin and Antilope, who also perceive this active participation trajectory in their space of possibles, who organise their events to show their work, and sell their work commercially, this was also the preference. For these artists, passion for creating art is intertwined with the necessity of active networking. What can explain the difference in their perception compared to those who follow the withdrawal trajectory? They all work in traditional media — painting or sculpture, are young (between 26 and 30 years of age), and possess less cultural capital than their peers¹². This behaviour aligns with field theory's prediction that artists seek opportunities to showcase their work and enhance their symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1996). It is unclear, however, what characteristics the difference in trajectory choices can be attributed to. Vocational account, as coined by Gerber (2020), that these artists follow — creating art out of passion and not at all to gain financial perks — fits the observation of the art field being the economic world reversed (Bourdieu, 1983).

Until now I have presented straight-forward trajectories: the one where artists retract themselves from active interaction with the art field and count on that “it will come to them”, and

¹¹ At this point of the interview, my heart had skipped a bit: to be frank, I have felt a connection with this museum, too. When it opened, its director Marjan Doom presented a publication called “Welcome in the head of the scientist” which turned out to be a blank notebook, a symbolic gesture pointing out how important it is to doubt in the scientific process. For me, there lies what connects science and arts, the openness to new ideas, the ability to imagine something that has not yet been imagined before. And yet, I simply did not think of such a simple action as looking up Marjan’s e-mail. Instead I have tried to get to her through our common acquaintances which did not enthruse her in a slightest.

For me personally the attitude of reaching out to people and actively reflecting on the ways of getting in the right network has been an eye-opener. Before I would rather silently wonder how people actually get interesting invitations. Recently, thanks to this study I have dared to organise a studio visit for a curator whom I am friends with. Important though that I didn’t invite that friend with the attitude of a needy artist in hope to be invited for a project, but rather I asked them to give me feedback on my recent body of work.

¹² They reported to possess less books, they do not have family members active in the art field, and Antilope and 25 did study applied arts (interior design and product design respectively) and not fine arts.

the one where the artists actively seek and grab meaningful chances whenever they present themselves. The idea of what chances to grab evolves with their socialisation in the art field. Some invitations are better turned down as they do not earn symbolic capital and can be even damaging at worst, in case the overall artistic level of the presentation is low. Some open calls can safely be ignored as money-making machines for their organisers and not so many platforms to support beginning artists. But are there trajectories that manoeuvre among specific segments of the art field?

4.4. Selective independent trajectory

De kunstmarkt is een deel van de kunstwereld waar ik nog niet thuis ben. Of dat me afschrikt of niet, dat weet ik niet, maar alleszins hoe kom je daartoe, ik weet het nog niet, MV shares with me after having told me about her reach experience elsewhere in the art field (*The art market is a part of the art world that I am not yet familiar with. Whether that deters me or not, I don't know, but in any case how do you come to that conclusion, I don't know yet.*). Her father was an artist, and through her practice, she processes the beautiful and painful aspects of their relationship. His friends, prominent artists, one of whom has represented Belgium in a prestigious international biennial, have been mentoring her. Collaboration and co-creation play an important role in it: next to her photographic work, she organises exchanges in various media with other artists. Next to that she curates and creates projects to showcase other's work. She presents her work in different independent spaces, and now and then she is off to an artistic residency, through her employment in a local art museum she came into contact with various artists and galleries. Taking into account her social character, it is not surprising that her workshop is located in a small shared space, the middle of which is dominated by a massive standing table, where there were lying bits of MV's photographs and some drawings by the other artist. The walls are decorated with works by both artists.

Yet, when it comes down to personal experience with art galleries, she has consciously avoided collaborating with them: *Ik wil me niet verbinden aan iets wat me beperkt doet voelen, op een negatieve manier beperkt. (I don't want to commit to something that makes me feel limited, limited negatively.)* How come that sometimes artists, who are so active in the non-commercial context, feel uninvited or resentful towards the commercial segment of the art field?

Collaboration with commercial galleries is perceived as something dangerous, something alien. What if the gallerist pushes the artist to create that kind of work that sells better but the artist herself does not want to produce it? The presence of commercial motivation in an art space spoils the innocent experience of the art. *Hij denkt waarschijnlijk dat hij deze werken kan verkopen, dat dat ook zo is. Dus het is niet alleen dat hij het goed vindt, er is ook nog eens een publiek voor, —* told Dolly about the gallery where she was presenting a couple of her works at the time I met her.

(He probably thinks he can sell these works, that he can. So it's not just that he likes it, there's also an audience for it.) I met Dolly in a workshop that is located on the ground floor of her partner's house. She acknowledges the privilege of not having to pay for the rent. Throughout the conversation, she is generally aware of the financial implications of the occupation choice. The space is full of framed works, light boxes and like, all quite expensive things in production, let alone the photographs themselves. She had financed all of those at her own expense and wondered: *Ik heb niets verkocht; er zijn mensen die een prijs hebben gevraagd. Ik heb het niet verkocht, dus ik had toen het gevoel dat het wel goed zat. Maar hoe kom ik nu verder? (I didn't sell anything; some people have asked for a price. I didn't sell it, so I felt like it was okay at the time. But how do I move forward?)* When she talked about her collaborations with independent artist-run spaces, she was unconditionally enthusiastic: these spaces are important, they support new developments even in the earliest stages and allow artists to try things out. If an independent space asked for 30% on sales, Dolly didn't have any comment on that: it was not the main point of collaboration. On the other hand, working in a commercial context implies that the artist will have to talk about money, and valuing her work, which is confronting: *Dan voel je je echt een verkoper. Terwijl je, net zoals ik mij als burger ook niet altijd consument wil voelen en zou willen aangesproken worden, wil ik ook niet als maker een verkoper in de eerste plaats zijn. Je bent een maker. (Then you really feel like a salesperson. While, just as I, as a citizen, do not always want to feel like or be addressed as a consumer; as a maker, I do not want to be a seller in the first place. You are a creator.)* Dolly concluded therefore: *Ja, wij zouden vooral subsidies moeten hebben. Ja, om eigenlijk vrij te zijn van dat soort besognes en vrij van die factoren, en te denken aan markten en klanten. Gewoon ons werk kunnen maken. Dat is de vrijheid die de maatschappij nodig heeft. Of ja, als we die niet hebben, dan zijn we op dat moment gewoon verkopers en geen kunstenaars, als het alleen maar wordt gereduceerd tot geld. (Yes, we should especially have subsidies. Yes, to actually be free from those kinds of concerns and free from those factors, and to think about markets and customers. Just being able to do our job. That is the freedom that society needs. Or yes, if we don't have that, then at that point we are just sellers and not artists if it is only reduced to money.)*

Here Dolly referred to the relational account, as conceptualised by Gerber (2020), the society in general benefits from having a free independent art scene. For her, this logic expanded to expect the government to provide more financial support to the art sector, which would resolve the tension of putting a monetary value on one's work in a commercial context. Dolly turned to arts at a later age and studied economics and international politics before fine arts, she worked many years in journalism before turning to photography. This rich cultural capital probably informs her articulated position on financial mechanisms at play in the art field. At the same time, the narration

of this trajectory was not unique. Different other interviewees were at ease when talking about the art field in general or specifically the non-commercial context: *Dat is ook altijd zo, de reden waarom openingen vaak zo leuk zijn om over te praten wat je hebt gemaakt. En dat is eindelijk het moment waarop je het doek van het werk haalt en het eindelijk kunt openen en delen met mensen*, said Dajo. (*That is always the case, the reason why openings are often so fun to talk about what you have made. And that is finally the moment when you take the canvas off the work and can finally open it and share it with people.*) But when the art market came to discussion, his tone changed: *Uh, een galerie vind ik ook iets heel moeilijks. Ik struggle daar ook soms wel mee.* (*Uh, I also find a gallery something very difficult. I sometimes struggle with that too.*) Dajo curated several projects where he presented other artists, collaborated with some independent spaces, did an internship in a gallery to learn more about their internal process, and has a side job as an assistant photographer for exhibitions. For him, the distancing from the commercialisation of art, probably, stems from his close knowledge of it.

MV, Dolly, Dajo and several other artists whom I've talked to presented a selective independent trajectory. When artists perceive it in their space of possibles, they are often at ease in networking events. It is exciting for them to meet like-minded people and gather support. In this, there is a lot of similarity with the active participation trajectory. On the other hand, the relationship with the commercial segment is very troubled. The art market is uninviting, even repellent. The artists do not want to be salesmen. The galleries have dubious motivation: maybe they like the artwork but also they are aware that there is a market for it and they want to earn money. This conflicted relationship fits the prediction of field theory that the field of cultural production functions as an economic world reversed: art should be created for the art's sake, free from any influence of foul commercial motives. The main mission of the artist is to create art, an attempt to make a living by selling is deemed not pure. The resistance to influence from the outside shows some similarity with the withdrawal trajectory.

The question remains what can explain the variation between these different trajectories? The artists who appeal to selective independent trajectory more often have some family relationships in the field (such as MV's father) and tend to have more artworks from the other artists in their possession and thus higher social capital, they report the highest amount of prizes received which can be translated in a modest symbolic capital. Just as the artists who express the withdrawal trajectory, these artists more often work with more recent media such as performance, media art and installation. These artists also more often report having stable relationships and children (such as Dolly who has 3 children). The familial bonds would explain why this trajectory so easily navigates

the issues of networking, while higher cultural capital can be the cause of why the dogma of the economic world reversed is internalised.

4.5. Selective commercial trajectory

Ik vind dat de kunstwereld gewoon een beetje vergelijkbaar is met de gewone zakenwereld. Het verschil is gewoon dat kunst iets meer filosofisch is dan zaken doen. Eigenlijk is het nog riskanter in de kunstwereld, omdat de zakenwereld gewoon rechttoe rechtaan is. Je weet wat het is, het is de zakenwereld. Maar in de kunstwereld, door dat kunstzinnige laagje, is het soms een beetje een illusie van wat het kan zijn, explains NG to me while we drink tea at her workshop located in the building which is transformed to multiple artist studios. *(I think the art world is just a bit similar to the regular business world. The difference is simply that art is a little more philosophical than business. Actually, it's even riskier in the art world, because the business world is straightforward. You know what it is, it's the business world. But in the art world, because of that artistic layer, it is sometimes a bit of an illusion of what it can be.)* In the NG's workshop everything is decorated in the style of her installations which also often appear as scenography in her elaborated photographs. The floor is covered with soft carpet coloured in a single tender shade. Sometimes she organises tantra-therapy sessions here, because she wants to play safe and have an alternative source of income in case the art practice doesn't provide enough. Weekly she dedicates time to apply to different open calls and reach out to different institutions, proposing them her portfolio. She reported having presented her work in several independent institutions, however, those were social-artistic institutions that focus more on youth work or social work than artistic work¹³. More professional organisations leave her with the similar questions as have been voiced in discussion of the withdrawal trajectory and of selective independent: *Gelijk Kunsthal Gent, Vooruit, interesseert mij wel, maar allee, ik vraag me dan ook soms af: hoe geraak je daar ook binnen? Dat is ook weer via-via, want open calls doen die niet per se, denk ik. (Like Kunsthal Gent, Vooruit, I am interested, but I sometimes wonder: how do you get in there? That is also via-via, because they don't necessarily do open calls, I think.)* Masha 3, who follows the withdrawn trajectory, was wondering where the like-minded artists hang out. Johann, who rather appeals to selective independent trajectory, is not sure how the art market works: *Dan stel ik me de vraag: misschien moet ik gewoon de ballen hebben en naar die vent gaan zeggen, "Kijk, dit is mijn werk. You like it? Wil je het in je tuin zetten of denk je, nee, zo werken wij niet." Dat zijn dingen waar je niets van afweet, en ik denk dat het leven is voor de mensen met heel veel durf. (Then I ask myself: maybe I should just have the balls and go to that guy and say, "Look, this is my work. Do you like it? Do you want to put it in*

¹³ BREEDBEELD ondersteunt, informeert, inspireert en verbindt iedereen in Vlaanderen die in zijn vrije tijd met fotografie, film en mediakunst bezig is. Zinnema is het Vlaams huis voor Amateurkunsten in Brussel.

your garden or do you think, no, we don't work that way." These are things you know nothing about, and I think that life is for the people with a lot of courage.) But for NG it is easier to understand the businesslike gallery-world than an intransparent independent sector: *Ik vroeg zo van: "Kan ik gewoon naar de galerij stappen en dan zeg ik, dat is mijn werk?" En dan zijn ze van: "Nee, nee, nee, dat kunnen we niet zomaar doen."* Het was iemand van de galerie, de baas, die zei: *"Ik moet eerst iemand zeven keer ergens gezien hebben, allee, die naam moet zeven keer gedropt zijn geweest voor ik naar de portfolio ga kijken."* Dus dat is echt zo, ja, en dat kan demotiverend zijn voor veel kunstenaars. Maar ik, allee, ik vind het gewoon wel een leuke puzzel om te zien van: *"Oké, hoe ga ik daarin geraken zonder mezelf te verliezen en toch mezelf te kunnen blijven?"* (I asked like: *"Can I just go to the gallery and say, that's my work?"* And then they're like: *"No, no, no, we can't just do that."* It was someone from the gallery, the boss, who said: *"I have to see someone somewhere seven times, that name must have been dropped to me seven times before I look at the portfolio."* So that's true, yes, and that can be demotivating for many artists. But I, all, I just think it's a fun puzzle to see: *"Okay, how am I going to get there without losing myself and still being able to remain myself?"*)

As NG talks about her practice and her strategic approach to the art market, it raises a fundamental question: how do some artists navigate the commercial segment of the art field while maintaining their artistic integrity? Artists who choose the selective commercial trajectory often balance their creative aspirations with the practicalities of the market. They strategically engage with the commercial segment, choosing galleries and fairs that align with their artistic values. This approach allows them to sustain their practice financially without compromising their artistic vision.

I met 24E in the bar space of the independent artist-run organisation that she runs with several friends. She comes from a family that was not art-loving, to say the least. When graduated from the sculpture department she was eager to present her works but was quickly disappointed by the lack of opportunities for beginning artists. This is how she and some friends, who graduated in the same year and faced same disappointment, have started their own space. Originally they have shown their own work there and now they mostly rent it out for presentations of others. Her work is represented by a respected gallery in Flanders and by another gallery overseas, her work is regularly shown in different art fairs. She doesn't showcase her work in the local independent art spaces, but for a different reason: *D'r zijn weinig institutionele shows die mij nog aangrijpen omdat die heel veel een politieke achtergrond hebben of een sociale achtergrond hebben en een meer conceptuele insteek geven aan kunst. Maar dat zal misschien ook gewoon zijn wat er meer gemaakt wordt vandaag. Ja, of zelfs dingen gelijk Kunsthal Gent, bijvoorbeeld. Daar had ik ook hoge*

verwachtingen van. Maar dat heeft niet helemaal ingelost wat ik dacht dat daar ging zijn. Maar dat kan ook weer gewoon mijn smaak zijn natuurlijk. Maar, bijvoorbeeld, S.M.A.K. zou wel harder kunnen inzetten op jonge kunstenaars. Hm. En niet, da's goed dat die internationaal denken absoluut. En die, die maken shows, geen kritiek op 't S.M.A.K. maar. Ja, k weet het niet, dat uh, 't voelt niet lekker coherent geheel heb ik het gevoel. D'r is weinig visie. In S.M.A.K. vooral dan. (There are few institutional shows that still appeal to me because they often have a political background or a social background and give a more conceptual approach to art. But that might just be what is being made more often today. Yes, or even things like Kunsthal Gent, for example. I had high expectations for that too. But that didn't quite live up to what I thought was going to be there. But that could just be my taste of course. But S.M.A.K., for example, could focus more on young artists. Hmm. And no, that's absolutely good that they think internationally. And they make shows, no criticism of 't S.M.A.K. Yeah, I don't know, that uh, it doesn't feel nice, coherent as a whole, I have this feeling. There is little vision. Especially in S.M.A.K.)

Dolly was critical about her gallerist and very warmly enthused about her collaboration with an independent space. With 24E it is the other way around: while she is critical for the quality of independent art spaces, she is full of trust and respect for her gallerists: *Maar allee, ik had ook niet zomaar ja gezegd. Hem vertrouw ik ook, en hij is iemand die niet enkel en alleen aan verkoop denkt. En als ik iets wil maken dat compleet onverkoopbaar is, dan is dat allemaal oké voor hem. Bij mijn andere galerist is het eigenlijk hetzelfde. Hij snapt dat ding van gewoon dat je dingen moet maken zoals je denkt dat je ze moet maken, en de rest gaan we wel zien dan. Ja, da's wel echt echt geluk hebben. (But hey, I wouldn't have just said yes either. I also trust him, and he is someone who does not just think about sales. And if I want to make something that's completely unsellable, that's all fine with him. It's actually the same with my other gallerist. He understands that you just have to make things the way you think you should make them, and we'll see about the rest. Yes, that's really really lucky.)*

These ethnographic vignettes illustrate how artists appeal to the selective commercial trajectory. The selective commercial trajectory underscores the decision to prioritise commercial engagement while bypassing the independent circuit. They carefully choose their engagements, whether through commercial galleries or alternative income sources, to sustain their practice while maintaining their artistic integrity. It is important to notice that the artistic integrity is always articulated as more important than the possibility of the income¹⁴. Artists like NG and 24E face challenges such as the opaque nature of gallery representation and the need for alternative income

¹⁴ This, once again, confirms the theoretical frame expressed in *The field of cultural production, or: The economic world reversed* (Bourdieu, 1983). By appealing to a vocation account (Gerber, 2020) these artists are able to legitimise their involvement in the “corrupted” commercial circuit: they make art because they have to, not because they want to become exceptionally rich.

sources. Despite these challenges, they remain committed to their artistic vision, carefully selecting opportunities that align with their values. Out of all the interviewees, the artists who more often appeal to selective commercial trajectory tend to have lower cultural capital, they do not have family connections in the art field and they tend to work in more traditional mediums, such as sculpture and painting. The fact that these types of works are more easily accommodated in commercial galleries, might be contributing to their choice of trajectory. Compared to the artists who follow the withdrawal and selective independent trajectories, these artists are relatively young. Artists who referred to this trajectory, have also reported a high amount of awards and recognitions, which bolsters their confidence in engaging with the commercial sector. As opposed to the artists who appealed to the withdrawal strategy, all of these artists have grown up in Flanders, which might contribute to their sense of ease in the local gallery context.

A significant aspect of the selective commercial trajectory is the conscious decision to refrain from participating in the independent art circuit. This choice is often driven by a perception that independent spaces, while offering creative freedom, do not provide the same professional recognition or financial stability as commercial galleries. For some artists the independent circuit may also seem less structured and more unpredictable, adding another layer of risk to their already uncertain careers. For 24E it is also a matter of time: *Je merkt wel dat je heel veel moeite moet doen om te weten waar je interessante dingen kunt zien. Uhu. Ja. Daarom denk ik dat ik dan meer zou moeten doen, maar dat kost heel veel tijd die ik nu niet heb. (You notice that you have to make a lot of effort to know where you can see interesting things. Uh huh. Yes. That's why I think I should do more, but that takes a lot of time that I don't have right now.)*

Returning to NG's workshop, it becomes clear that her selective engagement with the commercial segment is a deliberate strategy to balance her artistic integrity with market demands. By carefully choosing her engagements and maintaining alternative income sources, NG and artists like her navigate the complexities of the art market without compromising their artistic vision. This trajectory highlights the importance of strategic engagement, allowing artists to sustain their practice financially while preserving their creative integrity.

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical concepts and empirical insights

This research aimed to address several gaps in the theoretical literature regarding how artists navigate the art field, particularly in the post-medium condition, where distinct artistic movements are less prevalent, and artists are no longer bound to specific genres or styles. Empirical findings confirm some of the strategies proposed by field theory (Bourdieu, 1984): following a higher fine arts education as a means of acquiring higher cultural capital, and participation in various awards

and contests as a means of building on the symbolic capital. These actions seem even more important in the context of the beginning of the artists's career, as my findings illustrate. The lack of support structures for beginning artists motivates them to self-organise exhibitions and start their off-spaces. By doing so they attempt to generate more symbolic capital in the race for name recognition. In this research, it was also possible to observe adaptation to certain beliefs: *illusio*, the belief in the importance of the art field, and the belief in the priority of arts above economic motives were self-evident to the majority of the interviewees (Bourdieu, 1996). On the other hand, there was little empirical evidence found for the strategy of undermining the established positions of the predecessors, and this might be attributed to the lack of defined movements that would allow for clear demarcation between consecrated and upcoming artists.

There is little evidence that the artists perceive the circles of recognition as a sequential uprising trajectory. There is a consensus on the importance of name recognition, however, the artists reported various approaches to achieving it: applying to various open calls, self-organising exhibitions, and control over what the press writes about one's practice. It is important that "the ball has to roll", meaning that one project often brings up the next, but there is little concern for following a specific trajectory. The proposition by Bowness (1989) that the artists rise to fame by passing the following circles in particular order: colleagues, institutions, the commercial sector, and the broader public, does not seem to be internalised by the artists who engage in both the independent and commercial segments of the art field and grab all the chances they can attract as well as by the artists who build strong relationships with galleries skipping the phase of collaboration with institutions. The current research suggests that artists do not necessarily follow a linear trajectory and instead use different kinds of opportunities whenever those present themselves.

The creative visions as the main instrument of communication within the art field can be found in Flanders and Brussels, just as Wohl has observed them in New York (2021). Beginning artists are trained to articulate their artist statements, short descriptions of what and why they make. Every individual aims to produce something unique, and personal, that no other artist can create. Several artists also presented awareness of how defining creative vision can be for one's career, and for that very reason cautiously produced varied work in different media, not wishing to commit to one particular type of work that is appreciated in the art market.

Gerber introduced four accounts that help artists navigate the art field: vocational, relational, pecuniary and credentialing (2020). In the empirical materials of this study, it was confirmed that vocational accounts often mediate the description of artist statements, alluding to the existential need to create, the need for communication through art, etc. There was also a relational account observed. However, there were no observations of pecuniary and credentialing accounts. The reason

for that might be that these accounts develop in a later career stage when financial stakes and credentials are more significant.

The present study suggests that taking a step back to reflect and focus on personal growth is an equally necessary part of the navigation in the art field as active participation in activities which help gaining the name recognition. In other words, not all the strategies that artists use are directed towards the art field itself (*outward-oriented strategies*), some strategies imply withdrawal and prioritising personal practice (*inward-oriented strategies*). The navigation in the art field thus consists of a combination of these push and pull activities. It can be argued that during the withdrawal periods, the artists build upon their cultural capital, by developing their narrative, perfecting techniques etc. At the same time, the withdrawal has a pivotal function of preserving the little means, such as time or energy, available. Demarcation of inward-oriented strategies provides a nuance to Bourdieu's theoretical framework, which in turn caters for a possible link between the field theory and Wohl's concept of creative visions as a strategy for accumulating cultural capital.

Inward-oriented strategies are usually manifested discursively when artists express their creative processes through introspective language. They describe personal experiences, emotions, and motivations. Additionally, artists narrate their artistic evolution, emphasising self-discovery and growth. At the same time, there is often judgement expressed towards those who use more active strategies. Sometimes the artist would also present a lack of understanding of how certain art segments function. This was generally a more introverted approach. On the other hand, outward-oriented strategies are often associated with references to creative collaborations. The discourse is generally more extravert, artists seem to be generally enthused about actively building strong meaningful connections with like-minded people.

The artists interviewed for this study experience different spaces of possibles (Bourdieu, 1996): what parts of the art field appeal as welcoming to them and where they feel they do not belong. Regarding the tension between artistic autonomy and the commercial art market, four primary trajectories were identified: exclusive involvement in either commercial or non-profit segments, withdrawal from both, and active engagement with both. These variations can be associated with characteristics such as genre, forms of capital, and demographic factors. For instance, artists following the withdrawal trajectory often possess higher cultural capital and work in newer media, while those actively engaged in the art field tend to work in traditional media and are younger.

However, these explanations indicate tendencies rather than providing definitive answers, as there is considerable overlap among the characteristics of artists appealing to all four trajectories. Beginning artists occupy almost identical positions in the field, suggesting that field theory can only

partially account for these variations. Some of the differences must be attributed to personal characteristics, such as whether an artist has an introverted or extroverted personality. Additionally, the choice to collaborate more with commercial or independent partners can often be attributed to chance. There is a general superstition towards the art market, with perceptions that “*de kunstwereld of -markt voelt eigenlijk als een soort smerige geheime plek waar geld wordt witgewassen en niemand veel weet heeft over de prijzen en hoe alles werkt*” (“*the art world or market actually feels like some kind of dirty secret place where money is laundered and no one knows much about prices and how everything works*”) (Duif). However, if an artist meets a supportive gallerist early on, the positive experience can mitigate this superstition. Similarly, positive experiences with independent art spaces can motivate artists to further explore that segment of the art field.

In conclusion, this study offers new insights into the lived experience of the beginning artists: what strategies do they employ and how do they navigate the art field. This research identifies two distinct types of strategies: inward- and outward-oriented. Focus on beginning artists provided an understanding of various trajectories they might perceive in their space of possibles, and as such expanded the existing theoretical framework.

Imagine the art field as a vast and dynamic ocean, with diverse zones representing different segments like the art market, non-profit art field etc. In this intricate seascape, artists embark on their journeys abroad on various vessels, each tailored to their background, conditions, and aspirations. Within this ocean of possibilities, there are not only currents but also distinct sailing styles.

The artists who appeal to withdrawal trajectory can be compared to sailors of a contemplative type. They can spend hours observing the underwater flora and fauna, the tides and the weather conditions, and they can easily navigate by stars. The journey they embark on is one of introspection and the pursuit of unlimited artistic freedom.

The trajectory of active participation is open to those who thrive on the energy of the sea. They love crew camaraderie, bustling ports, and lively interactions. Their ship becomes a floating hub of social activity. Picture a crew that hosts deck parties, engages in sea shanties, and eagerly explores coastal towns. They're the first to greet passing vessels and share tales of their adventures. These artists engage with all kinds of actors in the art field, seamlessly navigating between the art market and the independent sector, relishing the vibrancy and connections found at every port.

The artists who follow selective independent strategy engage in activities that expand beyond commercial purposes. On the metaphorical waters, these sailors participate in scientific research, leisure sailing, and environmental monitoring activities. They map out new territories and

take pride in prioritising knowledge and experience over financial gain. They avoid the commercial ports, preferring the untouched beauty of remote bays and the intellectual challenges of uncharted waters.

Finally, there is one more sailing type in the figurative ocean: that of the artists who pursue the selective commercial trajectory. They navigate the ocean on versatile vessels, good for both trade and exploration. Their main aspiration is artistic freedom, and the incomes from trade are directly invested back into resources needed to continue their journey. They understand the value of their cargo and navigate the ocean with precision with both pragmatism and passion.

Throughout this study, I have deeply reflected on my position within the art field — contemplating the distinctions between being a museum artist versus a gallery artist, and navigating the dichotomy of non-profit versus commercial circuits. My personal biases and aspirations have prompted me to strategise on curating my portfolio and aligning with projects that resonate with my career ambitions. I have found an affinity with artists who appeal mainly to selective independent trajectory. However, this study has broadened my perspective, drawing me towards exploring opportunities within the commercial sector. Engaging with open calls and networking with fellow artists and professionals have become pivotal in this exploration. My recent relocation to Brussels signifies a deliberate step towards immersing myself in its vibrant cultural landscape, to nurture my artistic practice and advance my career ambitions. A significant recent decision has been to commit to being a full-time artist, having left my previous job. Reflecting on Menger's insights into the special status of performance artists in France (1999), I am encouraged by Belgium's provisions granting social benefits to professional artists and art workers. Having qualified for this status after a short but intense career in the arts, I believe dedicating more time to my projects will greatly enhance my artistic practice.

5.2. Limits of the current research

This study involved interviews with a small group of beginning artists who volunteered to participate in the study. Consequently, artists with other experiences were not represented in this research. The scope of data comprises 25 interviews, field observations and personal materials, which were analysed with qualitative methods. The findings cannot be generalised as broadly as those from quantitative studies. However, by providing detailed contextual information and describing the research process thoroughly, the goal is to enhance the transferability of the results.

It is uncertain whether this study achieved full theoretical saturation. Due to time constraints, certain groups of artists, such as those who have a socially engaged practice or those working mainly in collectives, were not included. This may have limited the range of perspectives and practices captured in the findings.

The interview data were analysed by a single researcher, which ensured consistency in coding and interpretation. Involving multiple researchers could have increased the reliability of the analysis by validating interpretations and minimising bias. Additionally, due to time limitations, participants were not contacted for feedback after the data analysis. It would have been valuable if they had confirmed the accuracy of the analyses. When evaluating the results of a study, it is important to consider the role the researcher played during the interviews and analysis.

Despite these limitations, the present study aims to provide insight into the lived experiences of emerging artists in Flanders and Brussels, the strategies they use to navigate the artistic field, and the trajectories that seem possible to them.

5.3. Proposals for further research

While this study has provided a contribution to Bourdieu's field theory by identifying the difference between inward- and outward-oriented strategies together with four distinct trajectories of navigating commercial and independent segments of the art field, it can also be used as a starting point for further investigations of the diverse dynamics that are at play in the position in the art field taken by neophytes.

Not all variations in the trajectories could be explained by the use of field theory, and further research is required to understand the reasons why some artists prefer to withdraw from certain segments of the art field, or actively search for connections and collaborations.

The distinction between two types of strategies and four trajectories should be confirmed in a qualitative study with a larger pool of participants. Such research should delve deeper into the characteristics — such as personal background, educational experiences, and artistic philosophies — that contribute to the observed variation among different trajectories. The larger pool should include a diverse range of beginning artists, including those who predominantly create within collectives, as well as those who explore the domain of socially engaged practices. This broader sample would elevate the generalisability of the findings.

Another possible avenue of research is a longitudinal study which would track the same artists over time to observe if their preference for different trajectories evolves and if so, how.

Lastly, a comprehensive study that would follow beginning artists across different disciplines, including dance and theatre, music, as well as more applied disciplines such as graphic design or architecture, could provide valuable insight into the dynamics within the position of the art field that is taken up by neophytes. This might formulate a more precise nuance to field theory.

The current study is focused on a small segment within the art field. By narrowing the focus down, it was rendered possible to gain an insight into dynamics at play at that level. However, due to the limitations of qualitative research and limited sample, the findings can merely be seen as

suggestive, pointing out further lines of research. By pursuing the proposed lines of research, scholars can contribute to refining theoretical frameworks, as well as supporting policy development tailored to the needs of beginning artists.

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Appendix 1





Open call Facebook #1

 **Anyuta Wiazemsky Snauwaert** · 3 November 2022 · 🌐


in het kader van mijn masteronderzoek sociologie ben ik op zoek naar Gentse beeldende kunstenaars die recent (tussen 2017 en 2022) met hun carrière gestart zijn en die me een interview zouden willen geven in november-december

meer info via PB


  Anna Laganovska, Sacha Eckes and 18 others · 29 comments · 5 shares

 Like ·  Comment ·  Send ·  Share


Most relevant ▾


 **Cathérine Ongenae**
Ik heb op dit moment een artistiek debuut lopen bij De Spil in Roeselare. 😊

1 y · Like · Reply


 **Ilona Terkessidis**
Zet het op de Facebook van Luca, campus Gent, KASK en HISK?


1 y · Like · Reply

 Anyuta Wiazemsky Snauwaert replied · 3 replies


 **Tristan Faes**
Beeldend enkel?



1 y · Like · Reply


 Anyuta Wiazemsky Snauwaert replied · 3 replies


 **Sarah Baur**
Alexander Deprez ?

1 y · Like · Reply


 **Dolores Bouckaert**
ledere dag pleeg ik een debuut. 🍎

1 y · Love · Reply · 5  

 Dolores Bouckaert replied · 2 replies

 **Elise Vanden Broecke**
jep, ik en **Ulrike Pittomvils**

1 y · Like · Reply

 **Olga Golovko-Lambrecht**
Найдёте там точно, кто вам нужен:

Appendix 2

Open call Facebook #2



Anyuta Wiazemsky Snauwaert

2 April 2023 · 🌐

⋮

GEZOCHT

Voor mijn thesis sociologie zoek ik nog 5-tal respondenten. In dit werk tracht ik de grijze zone tussen "nog niet" en "wel" in de kunstwereld zijn, wat het dan ook moge betekenen.

Ik ben meer specifiek op zoek naar

- beeldende kunstenaars die "gestart" zijn tussen 2017 en 2022
- van niet-Vlaamse culturele achtergrond
- en/of carrière-switchers (mensen die eerst in een andere sector hebben gestudeerd/gewerkt)

Bedankt voor de hulp in mijn zoektocht! 🍷


Maaïke Leyn, Isfried Rodeyns and 9 others

9 comments 4 shares

 Like

 Comment

 Send

 Share

Most relevant ▾



Tristan Faes

Ik wil het zeker delen als je het publiek zet!

1 y Like Reply



Anyuta Wiazemsky Snauwaert

Check!

1 y Like Reply 👍



Bas Bogaerts

Telt van archeologie naar fotografie mee? 😊

1 y Like Reply



Maarten Marchau

Bas Bogaerts 😊 k denk dat gij al langer bezig zijn dan 2017 😊

1 y Like Reply 👍



Bas Bogaerts

Maarten Marchau juuust 😊

1 y Like Reply 👍👍



Renata Gibaviciute

I perfectly fit your requirements and can be your respondent

1 y Like Reply

Appendix 3

Open call Facebook #3



Anyuta Wiazemsky Snauwaert 24 July 2023 · 🌐

GEZOCHT
Ik ben nog altijd bezig met mijn master thesis en ik merk dat ik toch te kort heb aan 1 profiel: startende Gentse kunstenaars (gestart niet vroeger dan in 2017) die vertegenwoordigd zijn door een galerie. Iemand, help? Het gaat om een interview voor een masterthesis sociologie, duurt ongeveer 1 uur. Idealiter zou ik het interview willen afnemen voor 11 augustus.

WANTED
Still working on my master thesis and realised I am to short on one profile: starting (started not earlier than in 2017) artists in Ghent who are represented by a gallery. Help anybody? I need one person to volunteer to give me an interview of about an hour for my master thesis in sociology. Ideally before August 11.

 Dolores Bouckaert, Erik Haemers and 2 others 9 comments 8 shares

 Like  Comment  Send  Share

Most relevant ▾

 **Anyuta Wiazemsky Snauwaert**
Adriëne van der Werf? Koi Persyn? Anna Laganovska, kennen jullie iemand?
49 w Like Reply

 **Rick Brands**
Quinten De Coene kan daar wel voor te vinden zijn - of hij kent tenminste een tamelijk aantal artiesten die in dat plaatje passen. Of Bert Delapierre - niet bepaald beginnend, maar wél aan een galerij verbonden. Het is ook wel een ietwat specifieke vra... [See more](#)
49 w Like Reply Edited

 **Anyuta Wiazemsky Snauwaert**
Rick Brands mijn steekproef is afgebakend tot mensen die niet later dan in 2017 begonnen zijn, de interpretatie van 'beginnen' laat ik wel aan de kunstenaar zelf over
49 w Like Reply 

 **Anyuta Wiazemsky Snauwaert**
Sybren Vanoverberghe heb jij eventueel tijd?
49 w Like Reply 

 **Anyuta Wiazemsky Snauwaert**
of ben je vroeger afgestudeerd...
49 w Like Reply

 **Tatiana Pieters**

Appendix 4

Sample matrix

Pseudonym	Medium	Age	Gender	Education	How many books do you have	How many artworks by other artists do you have	Relationship/marital status	Children	Starting year	Where did you live	Durational collaboration with a gallery
No	drawing	26	F	Master Fine Arts	80	3	In relationship	0	2022	Antwerp, Ghent	
Flint	media art	30	M	Master Fine Arts	30	2	Single	0	2018	LA, Antwerp, Ghent, Ronse, Brussels	
Duif	painting	30	M	Master Fine Arts	300	6	In relationship	0	2019	Lancaster, Ghent, York, Lester, Oxford, Heidelberg, Potsdam	x
Медведь	media art	37	F	Specialist IT, BA Slavistics	200	30	In relationship	1	2016	Moscow, Ghent, New York, Montreal, Brussels	
Ekaterina	photography	41	F	Master Fine Arts	200	8	Single	0	2017	Amsterdam, Ghent	
Маша 3	collage	42	F	Specialist IT	50	0	In relationship	1	2019	Moskou, Radushny, india elders in Azië, Sint-Margritte, Gent	
Lia	painting	42	F	Master Fine Arts	200	5	Single	1	2018	Bruges, Ghent, Gentbrugge	

Renata	painting	45	F	Master Sociology, Master Business, Bachelor Fine Arts	1000	10	Married	2	2022	Vilnius, Brussels, Wales: 20 km from Cardiff, Spain: in a village for 1 year	
Katrien	media art	51	F	Master Anthropology, Master-after-Master Digital Storytelling	1000	0	In relationship	1	2022	Varsenare, Ghent, Brussels, Antwerp, Bachte Maria Leerne, De Pinte	
Rogier	painting	23	M	Master Fine Arts, Educational master	150	8	In relationship	0	2018	Bruges, Ghent	
Dajo	photography	24	M	Master Fine Arts	185	3	In relationship	0	2022	Ostend, Brussels	
Johann	installation	27	M	Bachelor teacher, Master Fine Arts	230	4	In relationship	0	2018	Leffinge, Ostend, Ghent	
Heremiekreeft	sculpture	30	F	Bachelor fashion, Master Fine Arts	70	3,5	In relationship	0	2020	den Bos, Ghent, Rotterdam	
MV	performance	30	F	Master Fine Arts	85	12	Single	0	2016	Ghent, Afsnee, Brussels	

667705	painting	32	Gender fluid	Master Fine Arts	80	20	In relationship	0	2017	Patus Janinas, Nina Janais Brazilia, Deurne - Nederland, Brazilia - Patus Janinas, Belurosoni, Hilst, De Klinge, Ghent, Turnhout	
23	installation	39	F	Bachelor Socio-cultural work, Master Fine Arts, Educational master	100	10	In relationship	0	2017	Delft, Ghent, Brussels	
Dolly	photography	53	F	Master Economy, Master-after-Master International Politics, Master Fine Arts	2000	18	Married	3	2020	Aalst, Brussels, Suriname, Ghent, Baardegem, Zurich	
Antilope	sculpture	26	F	Master Applied Arts	50	1	Single	0	2021	Leuven, Mechele, Ghent	
25	sculpture	28	M	Master Industrial Design	600	20	In relationship	0	2019	Bruges, Waregem, Ghent	x
GS	sculpture	29	F	Master Fine Arts, Educational master	200	5	In relationship	0	2019	Alverigem, Kortrijk, Mechele, Ghent	
Seishin	painting	30	M	Master Fine Arts	6	0	Single	0	2022	Luik, Doornik, Louvain-la-Neuve, Brussels, Ghent, Antwerp	x

DC	sculpture	24	M	Master Fine Arts	30	4	Single	0	2022	Koekelaere	
NG	photography	25	F	Master Fine Arts	40	3	In relationship	0	2022	Balegem, Ghent	
Sofia	textile	26	F	Master Fine Arts, Master Applied Arts	100	3	Single	0	2022	Antwerp, Ghent	
24E	sculpture	30	F	Master Fine Arts	0	5	In relationship	0	2019	Merelbeke, Ghent	x

Appendix 5

Informed consent form

Beste

In het kader van masteropleiding aan de faculteit Politieke en Sociale Wetenschappen aan de Universiteit Gent, voer ik onderzoek uit naar het fenomeen van debutant (beginner) binnen de beeldende kunsten in Gent. Gedurende enkele maanden vanaf juni 2022 tot januari 2023 neem ik interviews af bij beeldende kunstenaars wiens professionele carrière tussen 2017 en 2022 begonnen is.

Ik zou u graag willen vragen of u wilt deelnemen aan een interview.

Een interview duurt tussen de 45-60 'en wordt digitaal opgenomen voor analysedoeleinden. Enkel ik, mijn promotor Henk Roose en zijn assistenten mogen die data gebruiken in het kader van de masteropleiding.

Bij deze verbind ik me er toe om:

Op het einde van het academiejaar '22-23 de verzamelde data te vernietigen. De professor zal wel de data bewaren op een veilige locatie aan de universiteit. Er worden geen echte namen gebruikt in het presenteren van / rapporteren over de data.

De verzamelde data enkel te delen met de professor.

Enkel een interview af te nemen als de interviewer zelf en de respondent deze brief hebben ondertekend en elk een exemplaar krijgen van die ondertekende brief.

Met vriendelijke groeten

Anyuta Wiazemsky Snauwaert, Master of Science in de sociologie
 anyuta.wiazemsky@gmail.com
 +32 478 66 88 35

Ik,

.....(naam van
 persoon die deelneemt aan interview) heb kennis genomen van de inhoud van deze brief en willen WEL/NIET (schrapp
 wat niet past) deelnemen aan een interview in het kader van het onderzoek naar ervaring van transnationale cross-
 culturele koppels betreffend de realisatie van migratiebeleid.

Naam, voornaam

Handtekening

Appendix 6

Questionnaire

Hallo, ik ben Anyuta Wiazemsky Snauwaert. Ik ben een masterstudent sociologie aan de UGent. In mijn masteronderzoek peil ik naar het fenomeen van debutant in de beeldende kunstensector in Gent. 'Debutant' betekent in deze context dat het om beginners gaat, mensen in het begin van hun professionele carrière staan. Ik heb mijn steekproef voor deze reden afgebakend met kunstenaars die tussen 2017 en 2022 begonnen zijn. Ik wil u nogmaals bedanken voor het meedoen aan het onderzoek. Het interview zal ongeveer drie kwartier duren. Uw naam zal nergens in het onderzoek vermeld worden. Hiermee wil ik volledige anonimiteit van de correspondenten garanderen.

De resultaten die verzamelt zullen worden in dit interview, zullen enkel door mij en mijn promotor Henk Roose bekeken worden. Om achteraf dit interview naar behoren te kunnen analyseren heb ik dan ook besloten om dit interview mits uw toestemming op te nemen.

Er zijn geen juiste of foute antwoorden aangezien dit interview over persoonlijke zaken gaat. U bent vrij om vragen niet te beantwoorden. Ik wil hierbij wel benadrukken dat in het belang van het onderzoek u een zo goed mogelijk antwoord probeert te geven op de vragen. Moest u na afloop van het interview nog vragen hebben kunt u bij mij of bij professor Roose terecht.

We beginnen het interview met een algemene vraag.

Wat zou u graag als codenaam willen gebruiken?

Na deze algemene vragen, kunnen we beginnen aan de interviewvragen.

Self image

- Please introduce yourself (kunstenaar, professionele kunstenaar, schilder, ...)

Practice

- What are you making (formal qualities: the material, the medium, physical description)
- Why are you making it (artist statement, motivation)

Professionalism

- Describe the art world you are a part of (open question: peers, curators, organisations, collectors)

- What are your or plans aspirations with your artistic career (where do you see yourself in 5-10-29 years)

Financial

- How do you spend your time (full-time artist or in combination with another job)
- Do you consider finances in your practice? How?

Afsluitend wil ik graag uw mening horen over deze case studies.

Case study 1

- Case of Limma: Become an Art Market Insider - How the Art Industry Really Works - Magnus Resch #TOA18 - YouTube

The art market is in terrible shape: galleries are dying, artists cannot live from their practice, the market is highly dominated by a few players, and they decide upon what you see in the museums.

Transparency is the key to making the art market more open and honest. Who buys? Male, white, fairly old, and rich.

There are two art worlds: there is one small little one that defines all that you see today, it's run by a few individuals. And then there is the rest, that is struggling, that is dying. Galleries have to close down, artists cannot continue their practice. Most of the best-selling artists are mostly male, mostly white and American.

Art is for everyone. What we need is more bias. How to do that is via more transparency.

Ads: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofbWttwaoQ4>

Case study 2

<https://news.artnet.com/market/biennial-star-funding-market-2127289>

"The art market has clear ways to measure success: sold-out booths at art fairs, rising auction prices, blue-chip gallery representation. But there is a parallel art world—the biennial circuit—that confers perhaps the ultimate prestige.

These ambitious group exhibitions, often organized by top curators, have proliferated in just about every corner of the globe, from Coventry to Kathmandu. So who are the in-demand figures defining these critical art conversations? And how much do they overlap with the art stars who typically draw headlines in publications like this one? To find out, we counted.

We examined a huge number of biennials and triennials—more than 200 of them—held since the last Documenta in 2017 to generate a list of the most widely exhibited artists. As it turns out, the names don't correlate with art-market power rankings—not in the slightest.”

We sluiten af met enkele algemene vragen:

Age

Gender

Education

Amount of books in possession

Amount of artworks in possession

Marital/relationship status (not married and not in relationship, married, in relationship, widow, divorced)

Children

Education level (bachelor, master, PhD, middelbare school, lagere school)

Education field

Years active

What prices have you received

In what galleries and/or museums have you exposed your work

In what galleries and/or museums would you like to expose your work

In what places (names of the cities, villages) have you lived

Dit was het interview. Wat vond u er van?

Hebt u nog vragen of opmerkingen?

Zijn er zaken niet besproken die u wel had verwacht?

Nog eens bedankt voor het meewerken aan mijn onderzoek!