

**ARTISTS AND ART IN SOCIETY:  
CREATIVE WORK FOR SOCIAL CHANGE**

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CREATIVE WORK FOR SOCIAL CHANGE**

By

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**Abstract: How can artists uphold their creative autonomy from the dictates of capitalism without compromising their vision for social change?** Max Weber made it clear that the capitalism of to-day, which has come to dominate economic life, educates and selects the economic subjects which it needs through a process of economic survival of the fittest. (Weber, 1958)

Eleven visual artists from the Golden Horseshoe Area and the Greater Toronto Area participated in this qualitative study and provided in-depth interviews about their creative work, personal struggles and insights about the current state of the arts community. The data suggests connections between ‘starving artists’ and creative autonomy. On one hand, artists who pursued their art outside the formal art market deemed they had greater autonomy but experienced greater economic insecurity and social isolation. On the other hand, artists who practiced their art within the formal art market believed they had better financial freedom but needed to compromise creative autonomy and their vision for social change. On the whole, both art practices seemed to have lead artists to assume the concept of Art for ‘my sake,’ an assertion of their self-directed will and agency for their own purpose, reducing artists’ creative motivation to produce art for society and for social change. While it may be solitary, it may also be a revolutionary strategy that enhances more control and focus on the artists’ vision rather than pursuing society for validation and economic rewards.

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I dedicate the uplifting moments of this thesis to my children, Chrisia and Crishto, whose affirmative stance and social conscience provided me with strength to persevere and stay grounded.

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## INTRODUCTION

Being an artist goes beyond the mere purpose and temporal nature of creating art. According to Marx ([1932] 1964), “if you want to enjoy art, you must be an artistically cultivated person; if you want to exercise influence over other people, you must be a person with a stimulating and encouraging effect on other people.” (169) Being artistic is more than just a random outburst of creativity. For visual artists, it may or may not entail reason and call for creative vision although in some cases, it may act upon social conscience to depict images and tackle different issues in their works. The visual artist, Riegl said, has no need for a historical grammar of the visual arts nor does anyone who wants simply to enjoy the work of art as an object. (Riegl, 2004) The visual artist, according to Fromm, is one who has that creative attitude to see and respond, to be aware and be sensitive to what one is aware of. (Fromm, 1959)

Smiers argued that the question lies whether their creations play a relevant role in social and cultural life and if these fit with freedom of expression which is a vital human and social value. (Smiers, 2003) American pop artist icon Andy Warhol asserted that as a commercial artist, he does not worry about art or life (Warhol, 1968) and that “making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art.” (Warhol to Deitch, n.d.) American pop artist Robert Rauschenberg believed that “art can change the world and that the artist has to activate not only his own canvas but the world around him as well.” (Rauschenberg to Rose, 1987: 4) Kukacka shared Rauschenberg’s view that “art



and creativity have a place in effecting change, in creating dynamic places and in shaping the exchange of knowledge, stories and information.” (Kukacka, 2006:122)

Whenever visual artists create works that reflect their own ideas, imagination, vision, and own instincts, relative creative autonomy reside in their work, at least from conceptual to production stages where they can execute most of their concepts in their chosen medium. Although the intrinsic features of relative autonomy is socially constructed, shaped and circumscribed by social, political, cultural and economic relations, artists maintain that relative creative autonomy provides them with some leverage to utilize their art for whatever function they deem it serves and still maintain their artistic integrity without manipulation from outside forces. For Mieszkowski, “Kant’s argument appears to be the logical extension of a philosophical oeuvre that from its earliest inception considers the autonomy of the mind in terms of acts of construction.”

(Mieszkowski, 2006:4) For Berdyaev, “creativity is inseparable from freedom and that only he who is free can create.” (Berdyaev, 1955: 144) Shapiro also agreed that art wants to give itself; it does not want to be dictated to, either by the will or by reason. (Shapiro, 1976)

Akin to a religious vocation, being an artist takes on the same vow that calls for a commitment to pursue creative ideas, to realize social vision and to create works of art regardless of the social, political, and economic consequences. Through their work, this same commitment allows artists to encounter some

moments of spirituality that they themselves could only define without necessarily leaving the temporal state of their being. According to Lucie-Smith (1996), Hegel describes creative artists as “the masters of the God,” beings more powerful than the natural world, and yet able to heal the split within themselves and the rest of humankind (18). Harrington (2004) referred to Marcuse’s vision that art and aesthetic experience realize heaven on this earth in definite social situations without deferring justice, peace and happiness to an ever-beyond. (140) In other words, “the artist is a man who cannot separate himself from livingness...a man whose non-separation from livingness makes him an artist.” (Anderson, Wilder, Sessions & Lescaze, 1970:11)

Although artists manifest this creative power and relative autonomy through their art, they are mostly dependent on other people’s patronage for survival. They need financial support in order to sustain their creative vision and nurture their physical and mental well-being. This dependency, however, provides patrons and dealers the opportunity to exploit and compromise artists’ creative freedom in exchange for economic support. Sutton argued that “patronage has played a fruitful part in bringing works of art into existence, especially in those periods when writers and artists depended on some potentate.” (Sutton, 1959:32) Yet according to Burke (2004), patron holds the lion’s share of power or resources, providing favors, mediation and possible access to wider friendship and patronage networks for the client in return for loyalty. (4)

The spirit of capitalism has transformed various processes involved in the art market, identifying intervening parties between patron or consumer and the arts as varieties of institutions and gatekeepers (Smiers, 2003). Curators, brokers, collectors, gallery owners, state and regional authorities, consultants, auction houses, art journals, critics, fellow artists and many other different kinds of managers all have their say and control. (Smiers, 2003; Foster & Blau, 1989; Bolton, 1998, Solkin, 1993) Bolton(1998) points out that Wall Street has not been the only site of wild profiteering – the art capitals of the world have witnessed unprecedented speculation. Gallery owners trade artists and make deals in the style of corporate raiders (18). Smiers (2003) indicates that artists want to sell their works but these are reduced to being raw materials and ideas that commercial corporations transform or distort to meet their own tastes. (170)

Meanwhile, paintings became an object of widespread capital investment (Solkin,1993). Curators functioned as arbiters of taste and quality (Smiers, 2003). According to Marcuse, capitalism reifies desire and turns it into commodity fetishism. (Harrington, 2004) Above all, there were just five companies making about 80 percent of the decisions relating to the creation and distribution of paintings, statutes, photos, design products, multimedia works and suchlike. (Smiers, 2003)

State-run agencies generally claim that they financially support the arts. Ontario Arts Council (OAC) stated in its 2008-2009 funding report that a total of \$47.7 million worth of grants have been awarded to 1,443 individual artists and



1,006 organizations (OAC, 2009). Selected individual artists were aware that this grant subsumes power to both parties: that is, power for artists to procure required materials and to access resources needed to create their oeuvres; and power for the council to implement rules, policies and restrictions regarding disbursement of grant funds. Ben-Ghiat (2004) argues that promises of relative creative autonomy and state subsidies formed the parameters of a cultural policy that aimed to domesticate and normalize intellectuals while giving them the illusion that they worked within a pluralist system. (20) Read (1930) states that artists must ask themselves whether they should wait for a cultural pattern to be determined by economic factors or whether they should adopt the only alternative policy and be content to make their art. (21)

There are two widely accepted and known conflicting theories defining the function of art: “Art for art’s sake” and “Art for a purpose.” “Art for art’s sake” expresses the belief that art needs no justification, that it need serve no political, didactic, or other end. (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/36541/art-for-arts-sake>). Davis (1995) cited Canadian commercial artist Bertram Brooker who expressed his view that “an artist has no obligation to society but only to an abstract, indefinable “beauty” and that art is not and should not be useful to society in any sense whatever.” (127) Fromm stated that “this is not an experience of self as agent of creative experience; this is an experience of self based on a sense of holding on to my person as a thing, as a possession.” (Fromm, 1959: 51) Hobbs & Woodard noted that “what these artists regarded as freedom

was actually a new norm that stripped art of many of its mysteries and provided it with a public forum.” (Hobbs & Woodard, 1986: 4) Davis said that “‘art for art’s sake’ could lead only to an elite form of art, one appreciated by a limited few.” (Davis, 1995: 128)

“Art for a purpose” refers to intentional, conscious actions to bring about political change, to convey a specific emotion or mood, or simply as a form of communication. (<http://www.docstoc.com/docs/6020140/Art>)

Harrington(2004) alluded Marcuse’s argument that art’s task is to communicate a critical vision of freedom in concrete negation of the prevailing social order and to evoke alternative horizons of perception, experience and action that give courage to change the world.(140 ) Data gathered from this research generated a fresh concept based upon the function of art: “Art for my sake.” Research participants established this new concept and stressed that this function offered more relative autonomy for artists to do what they want with their art without manipulation from outside forces. Fromm supported this argument by saying that “it is the experience of “I”, of the experience of self which is another condition of the creative attitude.” (Fromm, 1959:49)

If artists need to survive within the realm of capitalism without compromising their vision for social change, what must they do in order to preserve their relative creative autonomy? This thesis will explore eleven visual artists’ perspectives on relative creative autonomy within the production of artworks from conception, production, distribution and finally appreciation of

their works in the art market. Have visual artists given up partially or totally their relative creative autonomy in exchange of economic pursuits? This set of questions is particularly germane within the current global economic downturn and its reverberations throughout the artist community.

Rose pointed out that essentially we have an elite society that is involved in safe things like investments and the “known.” (Rose, 1987) Marx concurred with Rose’s notion that where private property prevails, accumulation is the *concentration* of capital in the hands of the few; it is in general an inevitable consequence if capital is left to follow its natural course. (Marx, [1932] 1964) With capitalism, Bolton said that artists have become prime candidates to endorse any number of commodities; the advertisement portrays art as the natural companion of mink coats, make up and real estate (Bolton, 1998). Read suggested that a new social order will be possible only in so far as it provides for personal freedom which is largely a question of providing the opportunity for creative activities (Read, 1930). Kester said that artists will then be confronted with the difficult choice between quietism and withdrawal or renewed engagement (Kester, 1998).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will examine various academic discourses pertaining to questions of relative creative autonomy and comparative economic freedom. The term ‘economic freedom’ was used by research participants in this study which seemed to connote their feelings and their abilities to express and execute what they wanted in their lives and art since they have gained a considerable amount of economic success. This concept may appear ambiguous considering that success in the private market is not perceived by most writers in the critical practice as a form of freedom. Nevertheless, utilizing this context somehow assisted all participants to connecting their economic perspectives in relation to this study.

Under the pretext of capitalism, artists who aim for economic freedom seemed to have encountered a bargaining situation wherein their relative creative autonomy is up for negotiation. When artists enter the negotiation process with capitalists, the latter are in a vantage position to create value in every art piece, “influencing how the work will function and who will see and own it.” (Bolton, 1998:27) The notion of artists being relatively autonomous agents is more likely to be conceded once economic freedom becomes precedence for artists under this situation. Clearly, there is a direct linkage between artists’ economic independence and relative creative autonomy. (Burke, 2004; O’Malley, 2005; Friden, 1999; Van Houdt, 1999; De Coppet & Jones, 1984; Sutton, 1959)



This thesis will also probe on literature regarding the art market where promotion, distribution and acquisition of paintings and other works of art seemed to have been controlled mostly by institutions, government, corporations, patrons, dealers, and curators (Smiers, 2003; Foster & Blau, 1989; Bolton, 1998, Solkin, 1993). Sociologist and political economist Max Weber alluded to this phenomenon when he stated that “at all periods of history, wherever it was possible, there has been ruthless acquisition, bound to no ethical norms whatever.” (Weber, 1958:57) While this thesis will focus mainly on visual arts and visual artists, literature about art and artists in general will also be reviewed. Art-related information can provide insights about the nature and ways of the creative world. Delving on this knowledge can then lead this study as to how artists have demonstrated their relative creative autonomy and managed to achieve economic freedom. Literature about the life and works of some noted art masters like Magritte, Rauschenberg, Picasso, and Warhol will be included because of their influential creative vision that changed the course of art history. Lucie-Smith (1996) suggested that Karl Marx’s *The Manifesto* is one of the essential background texts for a comprehension of the century’s artistic development that art was a product of social interchanges and could be shaped in a way as to alter society itself. (18)

Another important aspect of this literature review is discourses related to “Art for art’s sake” and “Art for a Purpose.” These two conflicting theories that had generated academic discussions go back to early nineteenth century when

these theories were first formulated. Davis said that the conflicting theories of “art for art’s sake” and “art with a purpose” had been discussed by Ruskin and Whistler in the nineteenth century and returned to public consciousness by Roger Fry and Clive Bell in the 1920s (Davis, 1995). The role of these two theories became prominent and generated more academic exchange.

In his book, *Grass Roots of Art: Lectures on the Social Aspects of Art in an Industrial Age*, Herbert Read provides arguments that address the thesis question of the role of artists and his art as instruments of social change at his time. This was clear when he stated that “the duty of the artist is to preserve art from the contamination of the false values, political values and propagandist values, utilitarian values and entertainment values – all the false values that destroy the integrity and the universality of the work of art.” (Read, 1930: 84) Read also highlighted the impact of every artist’s work when he expressed in this book that “All works of art are bound directly or indirectly to be weapons. This is true in the sense that any pebble, whatever its shape, will create a ripple when thrown into a pond.”(Read, 1930:89). What was pivotal in most of Read’s arguments was his reference of artists as a different kind of worker, an attribution that was closely related to William Morris’s ascription of artists in his novel, *News From Nowhere*,” which is the passionate embodiment of a longing for freedom and equality rooted in the study of history and the love and practice of art. (Coleman & Sullivan, 1990) Read’s strong view as an anarchist artist was evident throughout his book which was essential in building strong evidence

about the artist's role in society. He stated that "vitality will only return with a revolution which humanizes industry at the same time as it disperses industry."  
(Read, 1930: 127)

Oliver Sayler, just like Read, belonged to the group of authors who addressed the thesis question regarding the artist's role in society as instruments of social change. This was clear when he pointed out in his book, *Revolt in the Arts* that "all vital art is a protest, a battle-cry, against human lethargy, indifference and ignorance, a summons to sentiment and significant living." (Sayler, 1930: 14) He also emphasized how "the arts challenge the infinite in both directions... particularly the infinitely important and the infinitely significant within the human consciousness and subconsciousness." (Sayler, 1930: 20) What was interesting about Sayler's book was his ardent use of the terminology 'revolt' in most of his arguments, as demonstrated in these two sets of arguments: "Esthetic revolt is the concomitant of social revolt, just as esthetic traditionalism is the companion of social order." (Sayler, 1930:16)

Cecile Whiting's book, *Antifascism in American Art*, is another important source that provided a sheer insight about how the "The traffic between painting and politics flowed both ways: while the exigencies of politics stimulated transformations of style and subject, paintings served as the crucibles in which ideological strategies against fascism were formed." (Whiting, 1989: 4) Whiting's main argument is "to the extent that all esthetic positions have political implications, all art can be considered propagandistic." (Whiting, 1989: 5)



Whiting also provided a concept about the role of other artists when she stated that “others committed themselves to freeing art from the shackles of overt political and nationalist agendas.” (Whiting, 1989: 5)

Janet Wolff's *Social Production of Art* provides an antithesis for this paper, setting the necessary balance to other arguments. Wolff argues “against the romantic and mystical notion of art as the creation of ‘genius’, transcending existence, society and time, and argues that it is rather the complex construction of a number of real, historical factors.” (Wolff, 1981:1). She added that treating the arts from a sociological point of view poses a threat to any traditional notion of the artist whose relative creative autonomy appears to be reduced to a series of social, economic and ideological coordinates. (Wolff, 1981) Wolff further expresses her views about artists and art in society when she explained that “the conditions under which art may be effective are determined both by the nature of cultural production at that moment and by the nature of the contemporary society, and in particular of its general ideology.” (Wolff, 1981: 85)

Remi P. Clignet's book, *The Structure of Artistic Revolutions*, brings a fresh perspective about the economic and social values placed on artists and their art in society. His argument tackles the thesis question of art for whose sake, as demonstrated in his argument that “indeed, such elites keep changing the definitions of taste in order to differentiate themselves from the cultural aspirations of groups with lower positions in the social hierarchy.” (Clignet, 1985: 147) Clignet's position about the existence of capitalistic pressures on



artists and the production of their art were further highlighted when he stated that “the rank ordering of the various arts, of the various genres within each field, and of the various works within these genres enables elites to legitimate their privileges and to justify their own social scarcity.”(Clignet, 1985: 129)

What makes Clignet’s concepts a powerful source of discourse is that these focuses on the thesis question about the dictates of capitalism on artists and their art as he mentioned that “the logic underlying the values of exchange conferred on works of art regulates the equivalences operating in art markets and hence their political economy. ” (Clignet, 1985: 128) Aside from the economic and political elements brought forth by Clignet’s arguments, he made one important statement about how artists are originators of ideas, comparing the artist to that of a sociologist in terms of being a vanguard in society. Clignet (1985) states that sociologists have borrowed from artists various preoccupations about the dynamic conflicts of individuals and their social milieu and the conflicts between individual freedom and social order. (223)

Editor and art historian Robert Hobbs presented an essential argument in his book, *Human Rights/ Human Wrongs: Art and Social Change*, emphasizing the role of art in society. “We need to focus on what art does; it establishes identity, whether that identity be personal, societal, or political, and it also endows groups with power.” (Hobbs, 1986: 7). Hobbs’ argument contends with the thesis question of ‘art for whose sake’ as he stated that “the freedom of “art for art’s sake,” of course, is severely limited because it separates art from life.

What these artists regarded as freedom was, in actuality, a new way of exhibiting art, a new norm that stripped art of many of its mysteries and provided it with a public forum.”(Hobbs, 1986:4) Hobb’s candid take on the role of museum as dictators of aesthetic taste defines how ‘it tends to turn art into decontextualized masterworks that elicit awe and appreciation of universal qualities that are usually left undefined.’ (Hobbs, 1986: 6)

Angela Davis’s book, *Art and Work: A Social History of Labour in the Canadian Graphic Art Industry to the 1940s*, brings a Canadian perspective about how attitudes towards art and artists changed as a result of new policies on the part of government and commerce. (Davis, 1995) Davis commented extensively about the economic impact on Canadian artists. For example, she argues that “the financial position of Canadian artists was always precarious, even when they worked for commercial companies.”(Davis, 1995: 129) She also commented extensively on the tensions between art for art and art for society, and the implications for society. “The conflicting theories of “art for art’s sake” and “art with a purpose” were hotly debated by artists and critics in Canada in the 1930s. (Davis, 1995: 127-8)

Lastly, Joost Smiers’ book, *Arts under Pressure*, provides comprehensive, critical and current information that specifically address the issues and discourses about so-called gatekeepers in the art market. The term ‘gatekeepers’ used in this study correlates to forces, individual or collective, that directly or indirectly control the statuses of artists as well as the economic valuation of their

art in the art market. He discusses thoroughly about the question of evaluating the content, ethical standards and quality of what the cultural industries offer is secondary to the major issue of oligopolistic control. Smiers' arguments in this book enlighten the readers about the plight of visual artists in the art market as their relative creative autonomy is often pitted against the powers of the elite. "Few artists sell well on the 'open' market or through the restricted range of galleries of contemporary art to be found in the Western world." (Smiers, 2003: 41)

This study anticipates gathering relevant insights both from interviews and literature in relation to the tension that exists between two opposing notions of the function of art: "art for art's sake" and "art for a purpose." What, if any, are the forces that shape this tension and their correlation to the experience endured by visual artists in the current economic climate? Have visual artists given up a part or all of their relative creative autonomy in exchange of economic freedom? Hopefully, this thesis will provide inspiring perspectives on the scope of creative activism asserted by present day artists. Amid economic affluence or indigence, this thesis will find out if artists can foster their social conscience by casting it through their art.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Qualitative methodology was used for this thesis. This type of inquiry was used because it can be evolutionary; it uses a problem statement, a design, sets of interview questions, and interpretations developing and changing along the way. (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992) This approach reflected the exploratory nature of the research question. I also liked the openness of qualitative inquiry which allowed me to interact with visual artists in person rather than using a more distant data collection tool such as a survey. Most importantly, qualitative inquiry provided me with a unique immersion in the artistic lives and works of my participants during the interviews which provided for richer and more nuanced data.

I specifically targeted visual artists for this study because of their unique status as so-called “starving artists” in a society that provides little or no support to artistic endeavours, resulting in economic insecurity and deprivation among those working as artists. I wanted to investigate how capitalism shapes the art market through its economic valuation of artists and their work, as well as the blurred distinction between fine art and commercial art. I was also curious why, according to Davis (1995), there is a “romantic mystique” that visual artists should be poor; that those who make money “are dismissed contemptuously as ‘commercial’ and therefore ‘bad’ (98). Most importantly, I was interested to explore the current social activism that artists execute in our present society.



This study employed a purposive sampling. Purposive samples are “a non-representative subset of some larger population, and is constructed to serve a very specific need or purpose...the researcher will attempt to zero in on the target group, interviewing whomever is available. The purpose in this case was to ensure that targeted participants fit perfectly into the profile of practicing visual artists particularly intended for this study.

(<http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/sommerb/sommerdemo/sampling/types.htm>)

In order to include a number of different creative perspectives, one-on-one interviews based on different categories and statuses of visual artists were included, namely: 1) established artists who have been practicing for at least 30 years who may be financially successful in their artistic career; 2) mid and/or established artists who have been practicing for at least 20 years and are still working their way towards a financially rewarding career; 3) established artists who have been practicing for more than 30 years and are still struggling financially; 4) mid and/or established artists who have been practicing for at least 20 years who uses art for a purpose; and 5) emerging artists who have been practicing for 10 years or less and working towards building their own artistic principles.

While awaiting approval from the McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB), I contacted artist-run centers and organizations such as Hamilton Artists Inc. (HAI), Niagara Artists' Centre (NAC), and Guelph Education Video (GEV) to inform them about this research and begin to gain access to visual

artists targeted in the Golden Horseshoe area and the Greater Toronto Area. With the assistance of coordinators and executive directors from HAI, NAC and GEV, a list of visual artists was completed based on their artistic statuses (emerging, mid or established), gender (male, female, gay, or lesbian), age (30 years and up) and artistic genre (painting, sculpture, printing, mixed media, installation, multi-media, etc.). Race was not used as a sampling criterion because most of the portfolios and curriculum vitae (CVs) indicated that the artists identified as ‘Caucasian’ (Canadian whites who were mostly born and raised in Canada).

The initial sample list included three females and three males which showed a balance of status and age. One male and two females belonged to emerging and mid category (30-50 years of age with artistic careers spanning 10-30 years) while the other three belonged to the established category (46 years of age and up with artistic careers spanning 35 years and up). Due to difficulty in recruitment and the time limitations of the study, only two emerging artists (25-35 years of age with artistic careers spanning 10 years or less) were included in the interviews. I looked for artist activists in order to strike a balance between views of commercial and non-commercial artists who share Bertram Brooker’s belief that “an artist had no obligation to society, but only to an abstract, indefinable “beauty” and to himself.” (Davis, 1995).

In total, there were eleven interviews that took place which will be detailed later in this section. Of the eleven participants, three artists (one male and two females) belonged to the established category. Six artists (two males and four

females) belonged to the mid category. The remaining two artists (one male and one female) belonged to the emerging category.

McMaster Research Ethics Board's (MREB) approval was eventually received for this research. Potential research participants were contacted using a targeted invitation approach wherein the researcher approached visual artists one at a time, and if they declined, the next participant on the list was contacted. When the initial list was exhausted due to cancellations and withdrawals, a recruitment poster was circulated among the three art groups (NAC, HAI, and GEV). I also requested the coordinators at these groups to encourage members to participate. It was a struggle to convince artists to contribute their time for this thesis as they seemed to feel that it detracted from the time they had available for their art work. Since most of these artists have day jobs, the only time they could spare me for interviews was usually late weekday nights.

Setting appointment dates with artists for their individual interviews were generally affable and easy at first, but meeting with them in person became particularly difficult. Some potential artist participants became wary, anxious and fearful about confidentiality and privacy issues, anticipating that their participation could mean losing government grants, corporate commissions, and even their day jobs. "The problem is that some are dependent, while others are not because they have power; most people "are subjected to a universal dependence, being obliged to get everything from those who are not obliged to give them everything."(Friden, 1999:48)



It was a fifty-fifty chance whether I could complete a full interview or whether they would change their minds and withdraw. One artist offered to hold the interview at a private gallery where her works were on display, but after her talk with the gallery curator, she declined to proceed and indicated that she ‘expected the interview solely for press release.’ Expressing some guilt about compromising the research, she agreed to choose one question to answer and have it on record, but later changed her mind and withdrew entirely from the study. As Glesne and Peshkin (1992) note, “Despite utmost care, rejections do occur. It is easy to overreact and become paranoid when faced with negative responses to requests to interview...” (35). Though another artist seemed enthusiastic about the project, she left me waiting for an hour and a half, later telling me that she had “overslept” although the meeting was set up for late in the afternoon.

In another case, there was the artist who took three weeks to schedule and reschedule, signaling hopes that an interview would take place, only to tell me that he realized he might be “exposed and subjected to stress” in the course of interviewing and so declined to participate. As Glesne and Peshkin (1992) note, “Interviewing is complex because of the number of things that are happening simultaneously.”(76) In a further example, one potential participant kept leaving the interview indefinite until one month later, he indicated that he wanted to decline to ‘protect his interest’ though this interest was never made clear. This type of problem is not uncommon in qualitative research as Glesne and Peshkin



(1992) observe that in face-to-face interactions, unforeseen circumstances occur that can considerably delay your plans. This can be perceived as a source of frustration and anxiety but the unforeseen is part of the world of exploration.  
(30)

I utilized an open-ended interview guide for this research. Most of my interview questions were constructed and focused around issues of relative creative autonomy and economic freedom. All of the interviews took place at a location and time of the artists' choice and were audiotaped. All recorded materials were transcribed, coded and analyzed. Transcriptions were essential in getting key words and concepts arising from interviews which would later be used as reference for data analysis.

In analyzing the data gathered in this study, there were four dominant themes that were referenced in order to arrange patterns or trends that came out of the transcribed interviews. The four themes were relative creative autonomy, economic freedom, function of art, and creative activism. Whatever important trends or patterns that emerged (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992; Kirby and McKenna, 1989) out of these themes, these were then correlated to the broader premise pertaining to forces of capitalism that compromised artists' economic and social statuses in society.

I stumbled upon a number of limitations in this research. The short time period in which this research was undertaken constrained the recruitment of participants. I recognized that there was an important link between time and

recruitment for this research because of the nature, instincts and ways of the artists involved. The geographical location of targeted visual artists within the Golden Horseshoe area and the Greater Toronto Area was another limitation in this research. Some of the profiled participants given by HAI, NAC, and GEV had their art studios situated outside of the targeted area, some as far as Toronto and Niagara. I had to abide by the artists' availability and schedule. I also had to deal with short notices given by artists when their location posed travelling challenges within the short time period allotted for this research. Another limitation in this research was the serious time restrictions experienced by artists. Since their day jobs have already consumed most of their creative time, participation in an interview meant taking away whatever scrap of time left for their art.

Despite the limitations mentioned and the fact that half of the names on the list of potential participants either cancelled or withdrew, I was able to complete eleven full interviews for this research. Although my original target was a balanced number of three males and three females, I ended up interviewing seven females and four males. I was able to interview artist activists whose input hit the balance with those who created art for art. The artist categories that were set up prior to interviews were referenced in order to achieve the balance between gender, class, age, genre, and status. Although some participants in this study used aliases, most of them had indicated that they did not wish to use an alias. This was reconfirmed with them at the time of writing. A list of the artists and their identities is included at the end of the thesis.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Section A: ECONOMIC CONTROL IN THE ART MARKET**

The current condition of visual artists and their art in the art market seemed to have been characterized as commodified subjects when economic control is perceived to be in the hands of capitalists. Research participants in this study asserted the view that although price tags don't necessarily reflect the value of artists and their work when they enter into art transactions, some artists equate economic rewards as a result of these transactions with creative success. This notion gets validated when society attests the same belief, which Wren (mid, female artist) often hears from other people, that "if you're not making enough money, then you can't be successful."<sup>CW</sup> Davis (established, female artist) expressed disappointment as to why economic considerations take precedence over creativity, wherein "most artists see themselves successful if they cover their costs but they don't take into account the large costs of cars, homes, travel, your basic lifestyle."<sup>SD</sup>

Artists who pursue economic freedom tend to be packaged together with their art, and may progress through advertising, distribution, and trading based on the grand scheme of those in control of the art market. Solkin described this state of affairs by stating that "paintings became an object of widespread capital investment and alongside other cultural producers who contributed to an increasingly active trade in luxury goods." (Solkin, 1993: 1). Zablutney argued that "the application of economic principles can help explain why certain kinds of



paintings or prints were produced and the reasons economic actors paid or received the prices they did.” (Zablotney, 1999:413) Consequently, artists find themselves in a situation whether to give up partial or total relative creative autonomy in consideration of these economic rewards. Paradoxically, by yielding their relative creative autonomy, artists validate capitalists with more power to influence their artistic career and control the sale of their works.

Majority of research participants in this study who belonged to mid and established categories have stressed that artists yielding their relative creative autonomy to capitalists seem inevitable when they want to gain relative economic freedom. “I tried to work without the influence of the market, but at the same time, it’s important that you have an income to pay the rent, so to speak.” TCA “Like most people, I had to eat.” AB “I don’t have the financial resources to promote my work.”SD Yet for Marx, this is not freedom; this is a ‘relation of exploitation,’ a corollary when artists have consented the monetary powers of the elite to manipulate and devalue everything artistic. “The material expression of this use is money, the representation of the value of all things, people, and social relations.” (Marx, 1932; 1982:41)

Smiers pointed out that “it is more of the principle of stock market that dominates the world of the visual arts and there are several powerful parties involved in establishing values.” (Smiers, 2003: 49) Reflecting his relatively privileged position as a full time artist, RB, one of the mid category participants in this study who has 22 years of art practice attributed his “lucky financial

circumstances” to his real estate success. He, who used to juggle his time in between odd jobs while pursuing his art, attributed the same economic principle that came about as a result of his success in selling his house in the real estate market to that of the sale of his works in the art market. He shared the same view with Smiers that “the art market is like a stock market. It’s kind of a system of belief and there’s a value to it that rises and falls, depending on what people believe. It’s almost like a religion supported by faith.”<sup>RB</sup> The application of the stock market principle in the art world, meanwhile, imposed selective and restrictive criteria about the valuation of the works of art. This practice caused barriers to many artists in accessing the art market. VY (mid, male artist), a research participant who has 26 years of artistic practice said, “It’s a hierarchy of structure that I don’t really understand at all. It seems to be built on profile of the artist’s name and the way people view art is how they price them.”<sup>VY</sup>

Majority of research participants in this study were aware about the exploitative working relationship between the elite and artists. They knew that by toiling in workplaces outside of their studio, it had provided them some economic relief but at the same time they had to rise above the consequence brought about by this relation of exploitation. Susan Davis, a established female practicing artist for 35 years, correlated her similar work experience when she was gainfully employed as an artist in the 1970s making stained glass windows and teaching calligraphy in Toronto. According to her,

the fees for stained glass haven’t changed since that point in time so you can’t do it. I can still do fired painting and staining but you know, it was 400 dollars a square foot then. It’s very labour intensive. I haven’t been able to raise the price.

Artists are manual labourers; five percent creativity to 95 percent labour and then you do this same thing again and again and again and again. You produce, you're a small manufacturer. I think the art market is totally artificial. You can't do price breakdowns for materials and labour and come up with anything that would be a price.<sup>SD</sup>

This work condition stemming from the relation of exploitation engenders alienation on the part of the artists to be creative in their 'other' jobs. Their instinctive desire to contribute their creative skills is hampered most of the time because of restrictive rules imposed upon them as workers. They were compelled to follow the rules if they wanted to keep their jobs. Friden argues that "dependence is a prerequisite to serf bondage and other kinds of lasting, non-voluntary obedience" (Friden, 1999:46-7) Steve Mazza, an emerging male artist whose artistic practice spans nine years, recounted a related experience about his work as a scenic painter.

There are very strict rules. I can make it look better but that's wrong. They dictate very much. It's actually referred to as art by the hour and a lot of times you're making work as fast as you can. It's very industrial. It's a pride in craftsmanship more than art. With the scenic stuff, the art, in my opinion, is done more by the artistic director who is dictating what it would look like. You're working as an artisan or a craftsman in that sense. You help them realize their vision to a certain extent and you're doing it with multiple bosses.<sup>SM</sup>

Most of the participants in this study were able to identify multiple gatekeepers whom they have been dealing with in the span of their artistic practice. The term 'gatekeeper' was used by participants in this study for the purpose of identifying individuals and organizations that seem to possess power and position to control their work in the art market. One of the research participants who had a straightforward perspective about gatekeepers was Tobey C. Anderson, a established male artist whose professional art practice spans 40



years and has served in his capacity as Director in major artist-run centres and advisor in government art agencies such as Canada Council and Ontario Arts Council. He stated that “the whole system is driven by dealers and curators and directors. Curating artists into shows is a whole kind of elite system of curatorial networking going on.”<sup>TCA</sup> The identity of other gatekeepers and how they have manipulated artists’ careers in relation to the art market will be discussed throughout this section. There are also deliberations about the relation of exploitation that seemed to have progressed as an indispensable condition, as expressed by AB (established, female artist), who viewed economic pursuits as inevitable when financial consideration arises and obliges artists to make a decision. “It’s negotiable in a way when the time comes that the financial aspect of it might be attractive.”<sup>AB</sup>

Through the years, oeuvres of the great masters and ‘chosen’ contemporary artists may have seemed to carry disproportionate price tags that are managed by the gatekeepers of which only the elite are more likely to purchase. Bolton (1998) described how “Collectors can change the status of the work of artists.” (27-8). Clignet explained that “such elites keep changing the definitions of taste in order to differentiate themselves from the cultural aspirations of groups with lower positions in the social hierarchy.” (Clignet, 1985: 147) Read argued that “The typical art of a period is the art of the elite, and it is contradictory to assert that the art of the elite can or should have the characteristics of popular art.” (Read, 1945: 71) Two research participants spoke

of their frustration with the way artworks are valued and priced on the private market, especially works of the great masters. Mazza (emerging, male artist) has indicated how works of art became trading items in the art market long after the economic gains of each work had outlived its creators.

Well, there's another issue with art when it is seen as an investment property. You look at what the Van Goghs are trading for these days. People are buying and selling these things in auction. Van Gogh didn't make any of that money, not for \$42 million or \$82 million. <sup>SM</sup>

AB, (established, female artist) who has 30 years of creative experience agreed with the sentiments expressed by Mazza, adding that she has encountered mixed feelings of guilt and disgust every time she wanted to put fair prices on her works, knowing that other works of art can command higher prices.

It's incomprehensible. You have absolutely no idea – like when you sit down to try and think what I am going to sell my work for. I've more or less gone with this, or more or less, basic standard for. I'm not a beginner artist so I'm in that range. But why some people make thousands and thousands for their work and why other people make only hundreds, is a total mystery to me. <sup>AB</sup>

Canadian artist activists Carole Conde and Karl Beveridge (1986) argue that “our product – artwork – is more often than not considered socially frivolous and useless, a “frill” in society's scheme of things, traditionally a hobby of the rich. From this point of view, it is intensely alienated.” (15). Two mid category participants in this study agree with Conde and Beveridge. LG (mid, female artist) said “People think it's frivolous,” <sup>LG</sup> while Wren (mid, female artist) said “They think art is a frill.” <sup>CW</sup>

Cork argued that “art persists in remaining the exclusive plaything of the very rich.” (Cork, 1979:1) Established research participants have shared Cork's



argument by confirming that the elite had transformed the art market into a potent playing field. “This is a rich kid’s game and it’s even more of a rich kid’s game now than it ever was.”<sup>SD</sup> They have witnessed how the elite had established rules and altered social principles that impacted the lives of artists. “You can certainly understand why art was considered to be something for the elite.”<sup>DJ</sup> They have also anticipated how and who the other players were in the game. “That is about politics play me out game to some extent...that includes curators, gallery people, people who are rich who like art and who patronize art... the in crowd, the hip people that holds the art scene.”<sup>AB</sup>

Van Houdt described the ways that artists, like merchants, were compelled not only to hone their art but also to anticipate the conditions in the art market in order to survive financially (Van Houdt, 1999). As a result, painters, sculptors, and engravers ceased to be viewed as mere craftsmen and were, instead, regarded as entrepreneurs (311). Most of the participants in this study were very uncomfortable with this entrepreneurial approach. Although these artists were somewhat successful in selling their works in the past, they emphasized that selling is not their primary concern because “We’re visual spatial learners and we’re extremely introverted solitary silent people who work with images, and yet we’re expected to go and present ourselves and be extroverted promoters and entrepreneurs of our own work.”<sup>SD</sup> “Most of us are bad businesspeople so that’s probably why art dealers take advantage of the situation.”<sup>VY</sup> “We’re not acting like business entrepreneurs and if we spend all of our time trying to develop our

commercial viability, we're not able to produce our work."<sup>TCA</sup> "I'm a realist. I can't turn many images a day."<sup>DJ</sup>

While artists claim that they do not create art for the money, they also expect to be rewarded financially since they need it in pursuing their art. The question lies whether or not artists must exert more effort to put that desire to the forefront and be clear as to how much their work is really worth. LG, (mid, female artist) who had been a practicing artist for 26 years, underscored the struggle that she has always encountered not just by herself but most likely by her colleagues in the art world whenever economic valuation come into play. When asked whether she tended to underestimate her creative work, LG expressed her feelings about the task artists have difficulty dealing with and that was to associate their work with monetary figures. This strain often resulted in bad judgment that resultantly undermined the true value of their work.

It's very hard to put in money in your work. I know I always undervalue my work. I might give somebody a price and then it takes me way longer than I thought it would and I always end up feeling that's not what I'm worth. And yet I do it over and over again. I think a lot of artists undervalue their work. I don't know if it's some sort of feeling guilty for selling your 'baby' or we don't feel that we deserve to get as much money. A lot of this has real lack of self-confidence when it comes to charging. A lot of us are not really business people... it's very difficult. <sup>LG</sup>

Some research participants indicated that they may be open to the possibility of playing the game in order to pursue their art, as what RB (mid, male artist) have articulated when he stated that "for financial purposes or for recognition, you need to step up through the hierarchy of the art world and that involves curators and financial people."<sup>RB</sup> Some who belonged to the mid

category had demonstrated blasé attitude towards “playing the economic game,” opting out and pursuing their work with hardly any regard for the maneuverings of the private market. These actions somehow showed conviction of these artists’ agencies, indicating not just relative creative autonomy but also economic freedom. Carolyn Wren, a female artist whose creative career spans 28 years, was firm when she stated that “I don’t care if anything sells because I make my money from teaching. What I’m interested in at this point is building my career.”<sup>CW</sup> VY, a mid male artist who has been practicing for 26 years, said, “I’m not worried about the gallery system or private gallery system or public gallery system because I work for myself.”<sup>VY</sup>

AB (established, female artist), was aware of the fact that in order for artists to become known in the mainstream art world, they need to play the “hip game.” But she was consistent with her autonomous stand by saying that

I don’t play the hip game. You have to play the hip game and you know, you have to be cool, you have to be known, and you have to smooth the right people. It’s the same with any other social environment. You have to play the game. I haven’t played the game. I don’t really care about that stuff. I do my work. If people like it, great. If they don’t like it, I still continue my work. <sup>AB</sup>

Research participants indicated that they were often confronted with defining and maintaining their respective statuses in the art market whenever they pursue their art. Oftentimes, the trend of what sells in the art market has become the guiding post in order for artists to become viable. Linton (mid, female artist) expressed her view about other art genres that sell in the market which can potentially distract artists to pursue their own genre and style. “Some artists make a decent living doing landscape painting. There seems to be an



endless market for that type but I don't work that way.”<sup>JL</sup> While some artists manage to keep their own style, other artists have the tendency to succumb to the pressures of gatekeepers just to carve their name in the art market. VY(mid, male artist), a research participant, described how other artists that he personally knew were able to cope up with this kind of demand. “I've known artists who changed their work, the way they work ,or the look of the work or the style of their work, all for gallery's sake or the purchaser's sake.”<sup>VY</sup> Further to these pressures, Anderson (established, male artist) also noted that some artists can easily surrender to the lure of the gatekeepers , stating that “there are enough artists out there who want exhibitions for their CVs, and some are afraid to stand up and run the risk of not getting an exhibition, of not advancing their career if they stand up for the principles that they have.”<sup>TCA</sup> Participants also claimed that they became cognizant how economic success dictated artists' social standing in the art community. Anderson stressed that in recent years, “We hear a lot of artists who equate their sales as their value.”<sup>TCA</sup> Davis (established, female artist) pointed out the connection between economic status that defines the artist's class in society and the overt display of discrimination by society in general. She explained that

I think 'clique' is that good word to use. If you don't have connections with those cliques and a lot of it has to do with being born into that social circle. Class makes a big difference. You know, you sell your paintings to your mom and dad's friends and all that kind of thing. I wasn't invited. I'm an outsider. It's still an extremely chauvinistic environment. If you're a woman with money, it can be delightful, but if you're a woman without money, you're not wanted.<sup>SD</sup>



What seemed to stand out as a priority for two emerging participants in this study was the valuation of their works. They have fashioned ways to be relatively autonomous in pricing their art. They wanted to secure a reasonable process of assigning an economic valuation of their art. Mazza said that his own method of pricing his works was more of trusting his own judgment and instinct, although he knew what other artists were using as a yardstick to price their works.

The way I tend to work is pick a piece that I have a feeling about and say, that is worth this much money. I don't know where that starting point comes from but that is worth this much. I know some artists who price by the square foot. They just give it up on everything else and say, you know what, my painting is this big, and I'm going to charge this much money for it, and that's actually a fairly common model.<sup>SM</sup>

Melanie MacDonald shared a different approach in putting a price tag for her works. She felt that the valuable insights given by established artists whom she consulted can have a considerable impact on the value of her work.

I never break a painting down and say, I spent this many hours so therefore the painting is worth that much. I think there are certain price points that you attach to some of the pieces, or you get some tutoring from mature artists who say, well, you know, maybe you could ask like \$500 for that.<sup>MM</sup>

Van Houdt(1999) attempted to illustrate an earlier method in the valuation of art objects by referring to St. Antoninus' late fifteenth century practice, describing that a great master might demand a higher price for his painting than an unskilled man, even though they were depicting the very same object. (313) St. Antoninus' archetype of the great master and the unskilled man have since been apparent in our present-day art market but the breadth in demarcating one from the other engaged more forces. The elite have extended its

power by appointing individuals and agencies to perform the task of ‘cataloging’ artists and their art. They comprise the ‘elite group’ that holds the power to swing the pendulum of financial and social statuses of artists. Davis, one of the established participants in this study highlighted the reality that in order for artists to sell privately or publicly, artists require business and social circles to depend on, and this needs to be rooted in the artists’ family connections.

Regrettably, she said she did not have the kin aspect to depend on. “People don’t realize how important your social connections are when it comes to opportunities for business. Most businesses are grandfathered and mine isn’t.”<sup>SD</sup>

Buchanan(1982) identified the *leadership of state bureaucracy* as the first lot of this elite group. Because effective control over the proletariat includes political as well as economic domination, the elite find it necessary to delegate power to the leadership of the state bureaucracy. (41) According to Canadian critic and curator Barry Lord (1974), there has been a small elite who have controlled most of our art, our art history and the ones who like to see painting in Canada as merely a reflection of one imperial style after another. (9) Canadian curator Joanne Murray described how the art system operates in spinning and developing a few chosen artists, articulating that

We in the art world watch developing artists with something akin to motherly pride as they make their way into shows, have their first reviews, then rise to the heights of say, a review in the calendar section of *Canadian Art* magazine, and then in the *Globe and Mail*. However, an art-world reputation, so fervently argued or defended, a matter for so much gossip and bitter in-fighting, can only become a mainstream reputation with a full-scale retrospective, preferably at one of the three major institutions – the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of

Ontario, or the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Such a show often arouses the interest of the international media, especially the American magazines *Art in America*, *ARTNews* or *Art Forum*. The artist may then be included in a group show that travels abroad, perhaps he or she will have international sales, give a few radio interviews, be reviewed in *Maclean's*. And when that happens a Canadian Art Star is born. (Murray, 1996: 159)

Publicly funded art agencies such as Canada Art Council, Ontario Art Council, city art councils and public galleries were created with a mandate to address and serve the needs of artists. These agencies are allotted each year with arts funding from the federal and provincial governments. It is clear from data gathered in this study that state bureaucracy had been acting as one of the visible gatekeepers of the art market. Anderson (established, male artist), who served in the past as committee member for Ontario Arts Council, said that

The Canada Council and the Ontario Arts Council are the gatekeepers of fees because they require those galleries to get funding. They require those galleries to pay artists' fees. If they are not getting funding from Canada Council or Ontario Arts Council, then they are not obligated to pay artist's fees. <sup>TCA</sup>

According to research participants, many artists have suffered financial losses, mental stress, and psychological burden while awaiting these grants. Most of them scramble to look for other resources in order to survive, at the same time reconciling the fact that competition with other artists had become a required appendage to the grants game that artists are expected to play. Linton (mid, female artist) was a recipient of some of the aforementioned state-funded grants. She felt that while the competitive nature of receiving grants gave her some sense of prestige, it also reflected the lack of consideration given by the government in allotting funds for artists.



I have been able to receive grants from different art councils: the Canada Council, I received two Canada Council grants, three Ontario Art Council grants and one Toronto Art Council grant. Receiving that money has allowed me to buy materials and to buy time to work on my artwork so that's a very crucial source of funding for artists in Canada. Everything in the arts is on a competition basis. We're all fighting the same table scraps that fall from the government. I mean, the amount of money slated to the arts is fairly small considering how many artists there are.<sup>JL</sup>

MacDonald (emerging, female artist) shared her own observation how lopsided grants seemed to be distributed among artists. "If you apply for a grant and you get back a list of people that received the grants, you know, in Ontario, it's really concentrated in Toronto because there are more artists there but..."<sup>MM</sup> VY (mid, male artist) stated his concern about how grants for artists are being implemented. "I question individual artist grants. I question the way they're being doled out. I think they should be doled out geographically."<sup>VY</sup> Davis (established, female artist) who is familiar how the grants procedure worked, realized early on that she did not need to apply for one because she felt that it cannot benefit her work.

It used to be a rule of thumb as you apply for a Canada Council grant three times and then maybe you'll get one. Now Canada Council is to nothing. They're very open that they will not be your main thunder. So the whole time that I was a young artist, Canada Council was sort of the Holy Grail, but I didn't see my work fitting that.<sup>SD</sup>

Conde & Beveridge alluded that the advertising budget of General Motors of Canada is roughly equal to the budget of the Canada Council (Conde & Beveridge, 1986). As consumers, we pay for GM's advertising and that's corporate culture...and speaking about democracy, community arts is the means whereby the democratization of culture is practiced(16-7). Data in this study had



illustrated how funds allotted to assist artists when they needed it were deliberately absent. Some mid category participants like Wren experienced firsthand what Marx described as the relation of exploitation. She was expecting her artist's fee to be paid for a show in a public gallery where she had exhibited her work. She ended up running after the gallery that used her fee for the printing of the show brochure without even consulting her.

It's a bigger problem. For example, I had a show at a public gallery and they said to me, well, would you donate your artist's fee back for a catalogue, and I said, no, I won't...basically, they said that other artists would do that and I said, I'm sorry I'm not going to do that... but they've already produced the brochure and then they said to me, sorry we can't pay you your fee. And they didn't.<sup>CW</sup>

Canadian Art Representation (CARFAC) is an organization that sets the standard for artist's fee. It is negotiated between artists and art institutions. Anderson (established, male artist) argued that museums and galleries do not adhere to CARFAC's standard regarding artist's fees.

One difficulty for contemporary artists now is that many museums and galleries do not pay the recommended artist's fees by CARFAC and many do not pay any at all or they do not pay expenses so that really does have a profound impact on the ability of artists to exhibit their work and to produce their work. And even sometimes, when artists do get paid a fee, they don't necessarily get paid for installation costs and transportation costs that come out of their artist's fee which is against the principles that were advocated for in the 1970s.<sup>TCA</sup>

The second batch of the elite group is *collectors*. RB (mid, male artist), one of the research participants, recognized the importance of social skills that may facilitate artists to find collectors for their works. "If collectors see work that stimulates them and that artist turns out to be a great talker and a great storyteller and a lot of fun, that's going to help."<sup>RB</sup> Parsons (De Coppet & Jones, 1984), a gallery owner, described that there is the collector who comes in and

wants art for investment, or wants something to put over the sofa; there are those who buy for status, for some vague goal of attaining a higher social position. (27-8) Rubin (De Coppet & Jones, 1984), another gallery owner, stated how some collectors are motivated by greed, not just the money aspect, but also the drive to have, to accumulate, and to keep. ( 77)

*Galleries and museums* belong to the next element of the elite group.

Balkind(1983) described how in 1974, critic and curator Barry Lord spoke against the prevalence in Canadian galleries of “unoccupied landscape” and questioned its use in the search for national identification. (47) Gallery owner Cowles (De Coppet & Jones, 1984) defended his side that a gallery is a business, and the business should make money.(246) Participants in this study have pointed out the nature and scope of being represented by a private gallery, including costs, relationships and limitations they entered into.

RB (mid, male artist), said that he has always been represented by a Toronto private gallery and has since expanded his representation by another private gallery in Hamilton. “I had a dealer who has always sort of stood between me and selling work so I’ve never really had to think about it or deal with it. I don’t think it means that I made more money.”<sup>RB</sup> Linton and Wren, both mid category female artists in this study, expressed their doubts and negative perception about the nature and scope of gallery representation. According to them, their apprehension was caused by some of their artist friends who have experienced bad relations with commercial galleries.

I have colleagues that ended up being represented by commercial galleries but that relationship doesn't always last and there's a caveat - it can be a difficult relationship and some people have ended up leaving commercial galleries because they didn't feel that that the person was promoting their art enough. They take 50% of your sales, so there's that to consider. It can be kind of a mine field to artists, so enterprising artists just do their own advocacy really. <sup>JL</sup>

We have friends in Toronto who are part of really established commercial galleries. The owners of the gallery sell their work and then don't pay the artist while holding on to the money for a long, long time. Artists are calling them up and say, didn't you say you sold that, where's the money, and then they'd say, well, we had to pay over here first so yours is coming later. So even though they're well established artists in well established galleries, they still have problems with that. <sup>CW</sup>

Some research participants have acknowledged that private galleries operate distinctively from public galleries. Nevertheless, the thought of being represented by a gallery may bring anxiety and relief at the same time to artists. LG (mid, female artist) said that "One of the apprehensions for artists to get into a gallery is that that person(owner and/or curator) is going to take care of the marketing for you and all you have to worry about is making art." <sup>LG</sup> On the contrary, other participants felt that they are not worried about the gallery system, whether it's private or public. "I get to work for myself. I really don't care who I show it to, or whether the gallery or the curators are interested." <sup>VY</sup>

If artists have their own worries, gallery owners also have their own share of concerns in dealing with artists in the art market. Castelli (De Coppet & Jones, 1984) stated his position as a gallery owner that although the focus of his gallery has never been a money-making one, the commercial part of running a gallery is essential. Unlike museums, galleries are not funded, and must rely on their own resources (103). Castelli further argued that "You can no longer keep your artists today by saying, imperiously, that you will help them survive from month to



month on a modest stipend while they finish the work.” (Castelli, De Coppet & Jones, 1984: 108) Solomon (De Coppet & Jones, 1984) was another gallery owner who expressed his personal views that his gallery guarantees the artist’s artistic freedom, never dictates to an artist, and he will show work even if he thinks it unsalable.(239) Sonnabend (De Coppet & Jones, 1984), on the other hand, maintained a practical view that he likes to survive and to have his artists survive as well as possible.(115)

The role of museums is supposedly seen by society as relevant in preserving works of art. However, Hobbs & Woodard(1986) have painted an adverse image of museums that according to them, “The art that has been made for museums is an art subject to manipulation by being sequestered in storerooms or by being exhibited as an example of a particular species (6). For some artists, this issue of apathy demonstrated by museums and galleries to works of art has raised grave concerns, but for many artists, such action did not seem to concern them, at least for purposes of advocating what seemed to be appropriate and fair for their art. In fact, Anderson (established, male artist) said that instead of safeguarding themselves and their art, “many artists will compromise and not insist their fee or boycott the gallery who doesn’t pay fees, so more and more, we have to compromise on that issue to do projects.” TCA

*Art Dealers* are considered to be the next cluster of the elite group. Cooper (De Coppet & Jones, 1984), a gallery owner, had referenced the role of dealers when he said that there is a very fine edge between art and money, and it



is on that edge that a dealer functions. (190) Sutton (1959) implied that “The art dealer has not only performed a valuable creative role in supporting the contemporary artist. He has often taken a lead in bringing the paintings of little known masters before the interested public (37). However, some participants in this study had experienced the exact opposite of Sutton’s implications.

Linton(mid, female artist) who worked as a graphic designer in order to sustain her art, had been tackling feminist issues for the last 17 years. Recognizing the political content of her art, she described the kind of treatment that her works received from dealers:

Dealers said to me, we don’t feel that we can sell your work because it is at times challenging, you know, there’s a dark component to it, it’s not that dark work and there is a place for that, but because my work isn’t perhaps as ambiguous as other people who work with the kind of, I guess you could call dark imagery. It does honestly reduce its commercial potential and I am aware of that as I do it.<sup>JL</sup>

Anderson (established, male artist) described those early days when his own dose of activism had somehow created an impact on how society viewed his art. He illustrated the kind of societal pressure that artist activists like him absorb every time they take on social and political issues in their art.

It’s very difficult because people do make strong objections or you are rejected from opportunities... some people early on said, no, you shouldn’t do it. That’s the kind of censorship that’s involved. It’s a personal self-censorship that people want you to consider.<sup>TCA</sup>

The next area in the playing field of gate keeping is the *Auction House*.

According to Smiers,(2003) two known auction houses, Christie’s and Sotheby’s, together boast 90 percent of sales in the \$4 billion a year auction world. The two chiefs have discussed fixing commissions paid by thousands of customers,

dividing up rich clients and taking a host of other steps to stifle competition and pump up profits. (43-4). Although she understood how lucrative this field seemed in the eyes of artists, AB dismissed the kind of power that's attached to these auction houses. "It's a whole economic transaction. I don't think it really reflects value."<sup>AB</sup>

Smiers (2003) acknowledged the next lot in the elite group by mentioning *Big corporations* as major players where artistic advances were incorporated into commodity design and advertising techniques. (46) Smiers (2003) also indicated that in the field of photography, a dramatic development is taking place, which is also characteristic of today's economic globalization. The company, Corbis, owned by Bill Gates, already controls 76 million images worldwide and Getty Images Inc., a publicly traded company controlled by mark Getty, grandson of the oil magnate J. Paul Getty, has archives of 75 million images. (43)

Varied reactions were generated among participants in this study vis-à-vis accountability of commercial artists when creating art for corporate consumption. AB (established, female artist) said that "it's very suspect as soon as you start engaging the corporations and big money."<sup>AB</sup> RB (mid, male artist) was emphatic when he said that "I wouldn't consider these people artists if they're just serving the corporate world and they're making empty wall decorations. I wouldn't call them artists. I'd say, you know, you're a decorator or you're some corporate sly."<sup>RB</sup> LG (mid, female artist) meanwhile, had seen this

new technological and corporate development as a window of opportunity for artists to explore. She indicated that the possibility of working online in the field of photography promises to be an exciting venture for her as an artist. “I’ll give it a try. It could potentially become my part-time job if I like it.”<sup>LG</sup>

Smiers(2003) identified the next bunch of the elite group: *Cultural conglomerates*, operating silently in major commercial cities around the globe but their influence can be felt in the art market. “It is the power to select a few artists, reject the rest and to give those who are selected massive distribution and promotion.” (28) Artists who do not have connections or networking in the art market are left with limited resources to promote themselves, as what Linton (mid, female artist), a research participant, had recognized. She believed that “every artist is a brand”<sup>JL</sup> and that it is very difficult for artists in general to compete with those who have large networks functioning as conglomerates who can distribute works of art around the globe.

The last batch of the elite group was clearly identified by most participants in this study. Davis (established, female artist) stated the fact that

As some *curators* said, we have to dance with the curators. If you don’t want to dance or can’t dance with the curators, you don’t get to play. So it’s exclusionary in a very quiet kind of way because the prerequisites to participate assume a certain level of financial status.<sup>SD</sup>

Another research participant, Anderson (established, male artist) summed up the powers of the curator by stating that “You have to get to know the curators or you won’t be curated in your shows. The whole system is driven by the dealers and



the curators and the directors. They're the ones who dictate the art market and the Councils dictate what the programs look like in artist-run centers." TCA

Amid these so-called gatekeepers that this section has presented, artists have to deal with other gatekeepers, one of which is society in general whose perception of artists have progressed from bad to worse. Together with other lots in the gate keeping list, society adds more encumbrance to artists when the latter try to achieve relative economic freedom. LG (mid, female artist) expressed her disappointment about artists' needs to earn a living but are always compromised when the general public tend to leverage their work.

Artists want to make money. We know we really want to make money but people who can afford to buy art will want us to do what they want us to do. And I think most artists have a problem with that. That's where the whole commercial art gallery theme happened where there's the middle man who says, don't worry about it, you do what you do and I'll sell it for you. LG

MacDonald (emerging, female artist) experienced a different let down when potential buyers who are even close to them seemed to value things more than their works of art. "There are few people that I know of who could own paintings but they choose not to. They value large cars and all that stuff but they always comment on how expensive my paintings are."MM Anderson (established, male artist) agreed with MacDonald, describing how absurd society appreciates art. "People do not equate artwork with things like automobile, furniture, vacation. It's not as valuable. You go to their house, they might have a \$2,000 - \$3,000 sofa and above it would be a print that they got really cheap."TCA

Through participants and literature, this section somehow identified and discussed the elite, individuals, and agencies as major forces behind the



economic control of the art market. Society has also been deemed as part of the gate keepers, maintaining its stiff stance towards artists, adding more economic pressure and pushing artists far away to the fringe. Artists were impelled to deal with any or all of these gatekeepers if they decide to promote and/or sell their works in the art market, even if limited choices were presented to them that may even lead to forfeiture of their artistic control. Artists must either participate or decline the opportunity of joining the playing field of visual arts, designed oppressively by the gatekeepers for the benefit of the elite.

## Section B:

### UPHOLDING CREATIVE AUTONOMY UNDER CAPITALISM

It has been established in the previous section that economic freedom was directly connected to relative creative autonomy. Most of the participants in this study indicated that when faced with the dilemma of prioritizing between economic freedom and relative creative autonomy, artists appeared to have undertaken a Herculean mission especially when demands coming from the elite are bound to surface. Conde & Beveridge (1986) presented the reality that “the ‘struggling artist’ is not wholly a myth, because majority of artists – ourselves included – live on the margins, if not in the mire, of poverty. A few strike it rich eventually, but for most it is always touch and go... then again, for many, striking it rich is not the goal. (15)

Most of the participants in this study who belong to diverse categories share the same view with Conde and Beveridge. Mazza (emerging, male artist) said that “most artists come across where they’re going to have to find some other means of income because to make full time income off the art is essentially a vow of poverty to a certain extent.”<sup>SM</sup> Davis (established, female artist) acknowledged the economic impact she lived through when she opted to assert her own relative creative autonomy and economic freedom. According to her, the choice she made was

basically the willingness to be poor, but I’m not poor. It’s a low income. I was willing to have a low income which was perceived as poor. My work moves slowly because we don’t have much money to put into it. I don’t have the financial resources to promote my work. We don’t have a car. We don’t have a TV, and we

don't travel, and that makes it possible for us to basically live on this single income. My husband is also an artist and he can't take on a very demanding job that would require 60 hours a week because he won't have the energy to be an artist anymore. So we're on a very narrow balance here.<sup>SD</sup>

Linton (mid, female artist) who has not been working since she went back to York University as a full time MFA student, felt how important it was to get the financial support she needed to continue her art:

As a visual artist, you generally have a day job. I mean, most creative professionals don't make a living from their work. There are probably less than 5% honestly of professional visual artists making a living. There are working artists that live on their sales. I'm fortunately in a financial position where I'm supported by my spouse. We have two small children. I have many art friends that they also have small children. They're waiting for their kids to go to school before they have enough time to work in the studio. Poverty, you know, certainly affects the kind of work you do in terms of materials.<sup>JL</sup>

Data in this study suggested that majority of the participants held other jobs in order to keep their relative creative autonomy intact while supplementing their art. "I've always had a day job or some other means for financial support, so art has always been kind of my full time preoccupation but it's always been supported by a part-time financial job."<sup>RB</sup> "I was a teacher and that gave me the income and the freedom and a relatively creative autonomy to produce work without too many constraints."<sup>TCA</sup> "This is my 27th year as a physical therapist. I wanted the job that will help pay the bills."<sup>DJ</sup> "The idea that somebody would do nothing except work as an artist is seen as an impossibility. You need to have a job to support your art."<sup>SD</sup>

Notwithstanding other jobs that these participants were keeping, they were unable to attain relative economic freedom and still felt strained to sustain their art. Worse, they were losing money instead of earning it.

There's not a lot of money in this by any means. I'm losing money often on my art. After you factor in studio costs and material costs, it really does require another job that brings in other revenues to support that. Where you lose creative control is when you start thinking about what the people want...<sup>SM</sup>

My art costs a lot of money to make so I can't make it unless I have a job to make money. Artists' fees aren't enough. For example, one of the shows that I had cost me \$7,000 to make the work but I got paid \$2,000, maybe \$3,000 altogether...so it didn't cover the cost to make the work, never mind two years of labour.<sup>CW</sup>

Aside from economic deprivation, participants in this study have also disclosed their own creative experiences, confirming how society has deprived artists of their basic working rights. Artists have not been offered alternative options in practicing their art without having to go through gatekeepers' economic pressures. Government funding for the arts had been significantly slashed. Other financial resources have been scant. Public understanding had been insipid. Thus, artists could easily yield to the proverbial image of 'starving artists.'

Because of this lack of resources, artists tend to be poor. The irony is the artist can't exist without disposable income. That arts funding from the government was less aggressive. Harper was associating the arts community with black tie affairs. So on one side, you're right, there's this association of artists as poor, but they're also being associated on the other side with wealth and disposable income. <sup>SM</sup>

Kester (1998) supported these findings when he argued that the formerly expansive umbrella of support for the arts is rapidly closing and the assumption that the public necessarily values art making and the artist can no longer be sustained.(17) Since the 1990s, the Canadian arts community has seen huge federal and provincial cuts in arts funding, resulting in the reduction of artistic projects available for artists in the community. Consequently, artists continually scramble for other financial sources, mostly odd jobs, in order to survive.



The continuing effort to look for economic survival may have disturbed the continuum of their artistic pursuits, but most research participants were one in saying that they needed artistic control more than economic freedom in order to pursue their art, and the only way is to have relative creative autonomy. Mulvihill (1984) suggested that the autonomous agent is one who is self-directed rather than one who blindly obeys the commands or dictates of others. (172)

Davis (female, established artist) , one of the research participants, agreed with Mulvihill that “The only way to have autonomy is to make your own decisions. You have to be bloody single-minded independent person to get artist autonomy.” <sup>SD</sup>

The recent global economic downturn impacted most workplaces and troubled labour unions. Rifkin (1995) noted that the increasing number of unemployed and underemployed people will find themselves sinking inexorably into the permanent underclass. Desperate, many will turn to the informal economy to survive and some will barter occasional work for food and lodging. (239)

Data disclosed that artists have already utilized the barter system that Rifkin mentioned by using their art to buy things. MacDonald (emerging, female artist) painted for pork when she did a portrait for a pork farmer. She also did other bartering like massages, chiropractor, shipping, plumbing, framing...”I like throwing these things in the mix because I would probably never go and pay for a massage, but you know, using your art....”<sup>MM</sup>

Wren (mid, female artist) said that

“we tried to barter dentists but they didn’t go for it.”<sup>CW</sup> Anderson noted that, “Sometimes it’s partial cash, partial barter.”<sup>TCA</sup>

The continuing indifference and ignorance of society shown to artists and their art have caused artists to retreat and be solitary with their work. Most participants in this study shared mixed insights and experiences that reflect the same sentiment about society’s lack of concern towards artists. MacDonald (emerging, female artist) shared her distasteful experience about the ‘disrespect’ she received when she met with her lawyer to purchase a building and she ended up being ‘interrogated’ as to how much income she makes.

The way society treat artists I think is somewhat disrespectful. I think it can happen often. We went to the lawyer’s office last fall to buy the building and the lawyer asked what we did for a living. Steve said he is the director here and I said I am a painter. And he said, oh, what kind of a painter. Oh, like artist painter. And then he said, you know, do you make money like that, how much money. It’s like an instant opportunity for people to ask how much money do you make, do you make a living out of it, I mean, you don’t say that to too many other people about their career...I think there’s rudeness there sometimes when it comes to stereotyping about being starving artists and all the rest, and I don’t deny that.<sup>MM</sup>

LG (mid, female artist) shared her past experience when she hosted her own art exhibition. Hers was a demeaning encounter with people who were ignorant about the effort, the ideas, and the times she put in to her creative work, albeit the generosity of most artists to contribute their art for other people to enjoy.

People look at artists differently. I’ve actually heard people say things like that, why should you get paid to have a show, and I’d say well, because we did the work. This is the work we do. This is what we contribute to society. Why shouldn’t we get paid for it? And often, often, often, artists are expected to do work for free all the time and often, we would, because we’re generous. We want to contribute...<sup>LG</sup>

Anderson (established, male artist) expressed his displeasure about how art hobbyists and amateur artists have caused people to expect professional and practicing artists like him to offer their art and services for free.

People don't necessarily appreciate the lifestyle that we live. And we're being asked to donate stuff all the time. I mean, donate our artist's fees, donate our artwork, and donate our time because they get confused with these hobbyists and these amateurs who give their work away...<sup>TCA</sup>

VY (mid, male artist) described how government agencies perceive artists as entrepreneurs while trying to convince them to become part of the economic industry. He is bothered why city government agents seem to not understand the aesthetic reason of putting up galleries along James Street in Hamilton.

I was in a meeting with City Hall recently and they kept going on about galleries that they should be looking as business models for the people that are buying their stuff...all the guys from the galleries at James were laughing. It's like, we're not doing it for business, it's because we love doing this.<sup>PRM</sup>

Teaching is one profession that artists have contemplated either as a full time or part-time job in order to sustain their art. However, the systemic exclusion of a real arts program in the Canadian school system starting from elementary up to university level limited practicing artists to teach in schools and universities. According to data, practicing artists are seldom hired to teach art in regular school settings. Instead, schools hire teachers who are not practicing artists. They are mostly artisans who teach crafts to students. Anderson (established, male artist) used to teach visual arts in a college in Kingston before he became a full time artist. He pointed out that

The educational system does not require people to be an artist first, that is, to go out and be an artist for three years before they teach art. The student goes to university, get a bachelor's degree in art, and then they go and get their teaching



credentials and then they teach. They have no experience. So first of all, the educational system has to change. Once you have a full time university position, you're working for the man. And you have to be considerate of your career and your position in the university and the politics. We have several friends who taught but they're sessional positions and it's a very unstable life for those people. Students like those teachers the best because they're practicing artists. The academics will exhibit but they usually exhibit because of who they know rather than what they're doing. It's terrible to say something like this but it's true. There are flaws in who's teaching the teachers. And there are flaws in the bureaucracy of the system. <sup>TCA</sup>

Wren (mid, female artist) is currently teaching in high school and she explained how non-artists are being hired instead of practicing artists:

It's who's doing the hiring in the high school. It's the principal. The principal doesn't know anything about art that he or she chooses who will be the art teacher. And that universities, is it necessarily a group of artists who are deciding who is going to be the pros at the university or is it the dean or somebody who really doesn't know anything about art, some kind of a committee. <sup>CW</sup>

Shapiro described how "painters expressed disdain for the elite and the academicians as strongly while developing their mature styles as during their early period of political activism and artistic apprenticeship." (Shapiro, 1976: 85). Rogers stated that "In education we tend to turn out conformists, stereotypes, individuals whose education is "completed," rather than freely creative and original thinkers." (Rogers, 1959: 69). LG (mid, female artist) currently teaches art to pre-school children at an art centre and she attributed the society's lack of appreciation for art when at an early age, "Kids are not pushed and they grow up that art is the last thing...like it doesn't really matter. Perhaps the future generation will grow up thinking positively about being an artist if we teach them at an early age." <sup>LG</sup>



VY(mid, male artist) shared LG's(mid, female artist) view and expressed a related explanation as to why most kids do not seem to appreciate art when they grow up.

there's a fundamental flaw in the educational system. We're not taught to look aesthetically. We're not taught that it's even worth anything for what is aesthetical. There's no worth in joy for some reason. .there's no worth in teaching it." VY

RB (mid, male artist) encapsulated the current state of Canadian educational system in the context of art appreciation and offered a viable solution by saying that

I think Canadians are still a little bit afraid of art and I think that's partly because we don't have enough art education in our schools for young people at the elementary level. Artists need to engage kids much younger. When you see the way that kids are drawn into sports programs at a very early age, and even some music programs, and I think in visual arts, we've been a little bit slack in that and I think for that reason, people grow up and they don't really have a firm grasp of what art is supposed to do or how they can enjoy it. And I think if we had a lot more education in schools at a young age, people would understand the necessity for art better and I can tell that it will help us along in society. RB

While majority of the participants felt that teaching art was an extended component of their creativity, Davis (established, female artist) believed that "Teaching art is not being an artist. Teaching art is being at the level of your students and you can introduce ideas and horizons for them but for your own art, it's dead end."SD

Data had indicated that there is another creative way where artists can potentially earn some income. Commissioned works, either from corporations, public agencies or individuals, are available to artists on an irregular and sporadic basis. The nature and scope of the process could, however, subject them to exploitation and alienation, compromising their relative creative autonomy.

RB (mid, male artist) was candid when he stated that “I don’t work on commission. I totally have creative control and that’s the way I think it is.”<sup>RB</sup>

DJ(mid, female artist) was adamant when she said “I found that with commissions, it’s very tough. When I listen to the client, it never turns out as well. I felt I had no choice.”<sup>DJ</sup> O’Malley (2005) explained that the process of commissioning a work of art could be complex and detailed that it was based throughout the Renaissance on negotiation and discussion. (251) LG (mid, female artist) talked about commissioned works where she would normally accept directions from people who order works of art but at the same time, maintaining most of her relative creative autonomy.

Sometimes I do commission work and often, people will either give me a piece of furniture and say, do whatever you want with it, occasionally somebody may have some loose direction, something that they want to see done. But I have a lot of creative control.<sup>JB</sup>

But other participants held other reasons why they did not pursue commissioned works. Linton (mid, female artist) was aware of the process where the other party has creative input during the process. She felt that by accepting such work, it could compromise her art.

I’ve been asked many times to do commission work and I just refuse to do it. That’s just my personal belief and I do have colleagues that take commissions and it’s a very good source of revenue. But I just don’t probably because I worked for many years as a commercial artist. I figured that was my compromise so I’m just unwilling to compromise in my visual art practice. I just feel that if somebody, and rightfully so, commissions work, then they have creative input into what you do. I don’t think I would do my best work if I have to do something that somebody else told me to do.<sup>JL</sup>

“Man at the Crossroads” was an example of a contemporary and controversial commissioned work . It was Diego Rivera’s 63-foot-long fresco

commissioned by Nelson A. Rockefeller for the lobby of the Rockefeller Center in New York. Rivera depicted images of workers facing symbolic crossroads of industry, science, socialism, and capitalism, including Lenin's image in red colours at the center. Rockefeller stopped the completion of the artwork, dismissed Rivera and destroyed the fresco. Art Digest described how "the powers that rule Rockefeller Center called Rivera from his scaffold and handed him a check for the balance of his contract and dismissed him much after the manner of an ordinary proletarian." (Art. 21, De Larrea, Larrea, & Herrerias book, 1987: 94).

Prior to the destruction, Rockefeller requested Rivera to remove the image of Lenin as it was not part of the original sketch submitted. Rivera refused, insisting that to remove Lenin's image in the painting is tantamount to losing its entire meaning, even suggesting that he would rather see it destroyed. In an article contained in their book, De Larrea, Larrea, & Herrerias (1987) described why Rivera did not pursue his case in court.

Rivera claimed that it was not a legal question but a moral question; the Rockefellers have violated two fundamental, elementary rights- the right of the artist to create, to express himself, and the right to receive the judgment of the world, of posterity. They have no right - this little group of commercial-minded people, Rivera further said, to assassinate my work and that of my colleagues, and if they veil it, cover it with tar paper as they have done, that is as much assassination as its complete destruction would be. (94)

The Rockefeller incident was a manifestation of the continuing power struggle, conflict and alienation in the labour process between the elite and the proletariat. When Rivera entered into the work contract, he in fact surrendered a



considerable portion of his relative creative autonomy and allowed Rockefeller to become his co-creator. O'Malley presented the view that painters created the impression that clients who commission work are allowed to contribute to the creative process. (O'Malley, 2005). Fernie (1995) added that “ the role of the artist is merely a labourer and his product belongs to the capitalist.” (273)

Mieszkowski explained that “as a paradigm of textuality, production is enlisted to help demystify the ‘autonomy’ of the artwork, especially when it comes to claims for the volition or even the creative authority of language.”

(Mieszkowski, 2006: 4) Read argued that “the freedom to create is thus to be interpreted as a freedom to affirm and intensify the life-process itself or as a freedom to create a new order of reality.” (Read, 1953: 104) The reality is, the more that artists tried to protect their autonomy while toiling on economic freedom, the harder it seemed for them to circumvent the capitalistic system of the art market. Economic pressures kept shadowing their artistic careers. AB, (established, female artist) highlighted the importance for artists to have the financial capacity as counter measures in order to pursue their art. She used the term “financial freedom” to illustrate the kind of independence she has when money does not seem to be a problem.

Money is always an important factor which people don't like to acknowledge sometimes. So having enough money to have the supplies and the access to the studio. I'm not dependent on anybody so I can do what I like, so I have financial freedom. If you're answering to somebody else for your money, then you're not in a position to do your art without some sort of impediments. <sup>KB</sup>

Relative creative autonomy, while it is intrinsic during the creative process, can also be pitted against the dictates of capitalism in order to assert



agency. Smiers (1998) acknowledged that market forces do not provide the appropriate setting for the development of democratic artistic rights, one in which many artists can make their voices heard through their work. (169)

Lord (1974) argued, however, that the underlying question here for all artists is whether they are to serve themselves in their art, or to serve the people. (242)

Some research participants underscored the responsibility of every artist to uphold their relative creative autonomy amid economic pressures. RB (mid, male artist), was asked how artists can preserve their relative creative autonomy, and he had this to say: “I think that’s a good question for every artist as to how far you are willing to share control of your work with other people and to allow the audience to influence you. And I think that’s the question every artist has to decide for themselves.”<sup>RB</sup> AB (established, female artist), believed that artists are always tempted with monetary problems which would explain why they could easily lose their relative creative autonomy if they yield to economic pressures.

I suppose creative autonomy comes with your personal integrity. I would think for most artists that would be the case but you could lose it. You could be seduced by money. You could be seduced by fame. You can be seduced by a lot of things. If you allow yourself to be seduced, you’ve lost it.<sup>AB</sup>

Despite challenges that could compromise their relative creative autonomy in order to gain economic freedom, some Canadian artists were successful in asserting their agency in an attempt to uphold their artistic vision. Performance artist Rebecca Belmore (Belmore to Watson, 2005) was able to achieve this when her oeuvre entitled “Fountain,” was chosen to represent Canada in the 2005 Venice Biennale. “It was a way for me to have control and create an autonomous

space for myself.” (24) Augaitis (2005) described how Brian Jungen, as a result of his Aboriginal-Swiss identity, has emerged as a force in the contemporary art world because of the commentary his sculptures and installations bring to the conditions of globalization.(5) According to Augaitis, Jungen’s gesture of cutting up and taking apart such symbolic footwear as Air Jordan is a dramatic one – lancing the seemingly impenetrable hold of commodity culture. (Augaitis, 2005) Murray (1996) cited John Scott, a working class artist from Windsor, Ontario who subsisted at a low economic level, had sympathy for working people, and reverberations of Marxism appeared in his art and formed an intellectual and artistic framework for his activity. (193) Aside from painting dark warplanes hovering over destroyed landscapes, Scott has also drawn rabbit-like figures representing humans who are deemed victims of the technological threat and militaristic oppression.

Research participants in this study had shared the same concept that despite the relief that economic freedom may bring to most artists, it does not necessarily reflect the creative valuation of art. Mazza (emerging, male artist) has put it in his own perspective:

There is a strong compulsion these days to apply everything to an economic value and I’m not sure that should apply. You’re taking one part of the system and making it apply to the whole. You have this issue where suddenly a price tag defines the artistic value to a lot of people. They judge whether or not it’s worthwhile based on its price tag which is strange in itself... <sup>SM</sup>

Through their creative power, artists can uphold their relative creative autonomy under capitalism regardless of the hurdles that they face just to achieve considerable economic freedom. They have realized that the impetus to create

art is actually a key point during those trying times in rising above the challenge. After all, art is a powerful tool. Artists can utilize their art to express truth in any medium, style and form. “Nothing is not political; everything is political.” <sup>SM</sup>

## Section C:

### ART FOR WHOSE SAKE: ART, SOCIETY OR ME

*“Art for art’s sake” is a slogan translated from the French l’art pour l’art, which was coined in the early 19th century by the French philosopher Victor Cousin. The phrase expresses the belief held by many writers and artists, especially those associated with Aestheticism, that art needs no justification, that it need serve no political, didactic, or other end.*  
(<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/36541/art-for-arts-sake>)

*“Art for a purpose” refers to intentional, conscious actions on the part of the artist or creator. These may be to bring about political change, to comment on an aspect of society, to convey a specific emotion or mood, to address personal psychology, to illustrate another discipline, to (with commercial arts) sell a product, or simply as a form of communication.*  
(<http://www.docstoc.com/docs/6020140/Art>)

*“Art for my sake” is a new concept that emerged from this research which implies an exclusive and inalienable function to create art for the benefit, satisfaction, and consummation of the artist’s self only, not taking into account other views and input.*

Before this research was conducted, it was fairly accepted that there were two major theories defining the function of art: “Art for art’s sake” and “Art for a purpose” - thus, the interview guide mentioned only two theories. Data in this study generated a fresh concept based upon the function of art: “art for my sake.” When asked during interviews as to which concept they thought their art belonged, most of the research participants were hesitant in choosing either of the two. Although they were inclined to choose art for art’s sake, they put forward this new concept that emerged as a way of asserting their own agency in often restricted and unsupportive world. “It’s an expression of myself to a certain extent and that’s where the ego comes in.”<sup>SM</sup> “I don’t have a specific audience in mind. I think it’s me. It’s a very personal dialogue.”<sup>VY</sup>



The concept of “art for my sake” may sound individualistic and tend to suggest a capitalistic means of self-advancement which may defeat the purpose of utilizing art for social change. But at the same time, this concept serves as a passage for artists to gain the workspace they needed where they may feel less constrained and become more relatively autonomous. When artists maintained their self-directed relative autonomy, they were more likely to exercise their own capabilities to critique social conditions and relations through their art. Relative autonomy in art can take on a very individual form, as contained in AB’s (established, female artist) and RB’s (mid, male artist) perspectives.

For me, it’s art for my sake. I mean, primarily I do it for me. I don’t do it for anybody else. I do it because I love to do it because it makes me feel good about myself. I mean, it gives me value to myself, so that’s why I do it; and anybody else, I don’t care. It’s just for me. <sup>AB</sup>

It’s more like art for my sake actually. Art for art’s sake sounds like that horrible immediate sting that Harper is talking about all the time like some empty thing that nobody understands that makes it for the small elite. I don’t think most artists make art like that. <sup>RB</sup>

Davis (1995) explains that before the emergence of the concept of “art for art’s sake” in the nineteenth century, art was always assumed to have a purpose. Art served four major functions: recording, beautifying, publicizing ideas or convictions “intended to persuade people to new or different beliefs,” and illustrating in order to disseminate information. (140) These ideas were echoed by most of the research participants in various ways as revealed in Linton’s (mid, female artist) views:

Art for art’s sake, to me, I would characterize that as art that is decorative but has no meaning. I’m a fan of decorative arts but I would say that in my mind, there has to be a meaning behind the work. Work that I enjoy personally by other

artists is work that often has layers of meaning behind it. To me, that's the most satisfying work to view and as an artist, that's the most satisfying work to create.  
JL

Mazza (emerging, male artist) agreed with the points raised by Davis and Linton, arguing that “There’s always something behind, whether it’s political propaganda and these are the more overt signs. In its best case scenario, it’s a representation of the artist’s own ideas.”<sup>SM</sup>

Further to the interviews, there was some confusion between concepts of “art for art’s sake” and “art for a purpose.” Some thought their art was for art’s sake but realized it was for a purpose, and vice-versa. Some had attributed their thinking to the degree and extent of the message that their art had portrayed. “We could make statements about our art but they might not be political.”<sup>CW</sup> “My stuff is pretty accessible and I wouldn’t say radical. There’s a commercial element to it.”<sup>MM</sup> Bertram Brooker, a Canadian commercial artist cited by Davis (1995) who said that “an artist has no obligation to society but only to an abstract, indefinable “beauty” and to himself and that art is not and should not be useful to society in any sense whatever” (127) is a classic illustration of the concept of “art for art’s sake.”

Art masters like American abstractionist Jackson Pollock stated that “Painting is a self-discovery (Pollock to Rodman, 1957). Every good artist paints what he is.” (82) Another art master, Rene Magritte, whose surrealist art influenced pop, minimalist and conceptual art, stated that “We are the subjects of this absurd and incoherent world where the most insane activity is self-contradictory...” (Magritte, [1939: 72] 1997:16) Schama (2006) described how

Cubist Art master Pablo Picasso became introspective while working on his piece, “Guernica,” that he had thought the precondition for modern art’s creative freedom was its uncoupling from politics, not the reverse. (355) Several of the research participants agreed with these masters’ viewpoints, including Linton (mid, female artist) who stated that “having someone telling you that they’re legitimately moved by a piece of your work, to me is the gold to it” <sup>JL</sup>

Many research participants spoke about “Art for my sake.” It may well be that this concept is a revolutionary strategy that enhances more control and focus on the artists’ vision rather than pursuing society for validation and economic rewards. It may be indicative of artists’ economic and social struggles in a society that provides little in the way of recognition or support to artists who are not commercially successful. Many artists may turn inward to find the motivation and affirmation to continue their work. In their solitude, they may become focused on their vision without necessarily abandoning their societal obligations that are eventually demonstrated through their art. I will discuss this theme further in the final conclusion chapter of this thesis.



## Section D:

### CREATIVE ACTIVISM FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

*One of the first things the Pinochet regime in Chile did after the coup d'etat of 11 September 1973 was to whitewash the murals produced during the Popular Unity government; it also murdered progressive people, among them many artists. (Baddeley, 1989: 88)*

Van Gogh, Picasso, Gauguin, Magritte, Dali, Kandinsky, Klee, Manet, Degas, Monet, Lutrec, Pissarro, Seurat, Braque, Cezanne, Matisse, Renoir, Duchamp, Pollock, Rauschenberg, and Warhol. These are names of the great masters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that resonate in auction houses whenever their priced oeuvres are up for bids. These artists have utilized their art to assert creative agency, challenged the status quo, and pursued radical movements that have altered the course of art history. Linton, a mid feminist artist with 17 years of artistic experience who participated in this study notes the links between art and critical voice. She knows the crucial role artists play in society:

It takes artists to ask questions that maybe most people would be uncomfortable with, like talking, addressing some of the more negative aspects or experiences around issues that are legitimate, but perhaps in the mainstream media, don't seem palatable to people because they raise questions..."<sup>JL</sup>

Katz & Dars (1991) noted that in their time, impressionists were accused of being revolutionary in their assertion of the right to recreate the world as they saw it. (26) LG (mid, female artist) argued that although her works do not tackle socio-political themes, she believes that artist activists can effect significant change through their works. "Artists can reflect change and by doing so, can effect change...there are a lot of activist artists out there. I think they can have a



major effect on social change.”<sup>LG</sup> AB (established female artist), whose works also do not depict socio-political issues, agrees and highlights the impact of art in society:

I think art can effect social change in a big way... I mean in a very powerful way. And I think the artists who have that as part of their creative processes, of themselves, of their being; they extremely have a lot of impact on the political and social life.<sup>AB</sup>

To be political or not to be political. These choices may always seem to be present whenever artists ponder over their social conscience. Certainly, artists can live their politics regardless of the risks involved, as what Linton (mid, female artist) had always expressed through her art in her chosen genre:

There's a kind of an artist that would really take on the courage to tackle socio-political issues regardless of the financial implication... I think it takes a certain kind of personality, certain strong personality, and very resourceful personality to be able to make that kind of pronouncement and then actually live it.<sup>JL</sup>

Kuckacka (2006) agrees with these sentiments, observing that “As activists and artists, we strive to reject life-by-proxy, at every turn yet such reaching out, towards an immediacy of being, risks dissolving what already exists, threatening what we love, value and hold closest to us.” (110). Anderson, a established male artist whose creative career spans 40 years, tackles contemporary war themes in his works and installation projects. Prior to tackling his ongoing series of war on terror, he described how his experience as a U.S. Army deserter during the Vietnam era affected his emotional state, making it difficult for him to deal with the subject of war.

I'm a deserter from the United States Army after being trained for Vietnam so I was very emotionally involved in that conflict, in that war too, but I could not do anything to reference it in my artwork because it was too close to me. And I could not get my head around how to deal with that war and still be respectful of the sacrifices and the exploitation of people. When this invasion of Iraq happened, it was a complete

repeat of Vietnam so I was more prepared to be able to deal with it because more than 25 years have gone by... <sup>TCA</sup>

Another research participant, Davis (established, female artist), added some balance to the analysis of art as a means to advance social justice, noting that “Art is a tool. It can be used for good or bad. And art is used for the most evil aspects of society as much as for the good aspects of society... television, movies, magazine, all the media.” <sup>SD</sup> Linton (mid, female artist) maintained that artists are just one voice even if it can be restrained by commercial concerns.

I think there’s that potential that has a kind of utopian idealist sense to it that I think we’ve seen since the 60s and the 70s when perhaps there was actually utopian view of art. We’re maybe a little too cynical now. I hope that my art engages the mind, that it raises questions that it brings certain issues to the forefront. I think the artist activist is just one more voice. I think that artists can play a crucial role in that if our work is not hemmed in by commercial concerns, we then are able to address issues that are perhaps even controversial without the fear of advertising dollars being pulled out. <sup>JL</sup>

Activism in the arts can happen when artists utilize their art to take on important issues that affect society. Wren (mid, female artist) believed that

when I teach art history and contemporary art, the students are educated about what the work is about, and I believe it creates impetus for passion about change. If you look at art history, you look at David’s painting, *Oath to the Horatii* or Picasso’s *Guernica* or tons of Kiefer’s works, for example. Huge. It poses questions in the viewer’s mind. <sup>CW</sup>

Creative activism can also materialize when artists initiate collective action and set aside their individualistic concerns. Anderson (established, male artist) noted that artists need to transcend their art and become involved in the community by advocating issues that matter to artists.

the artist has to work with other artists. Advocate. Do projects. We formed the CRAM collective because it gives more autonomy and a little more freedom politically. It goes beyond the art. It goes into helping feed the homeless. There

are other projects that have gone on that advocated for social support and social change. <sup>TCA</sup>

Davis (established, female artist) commented on how art and conflict are interconnected, often highlighting the way that art can be used for social change, rather than merely decorate the social environment.

I'm coming at art at a very high level... I want profound social change. I'm not interested in doing decorative stuff. I'm not interested in raising stripes on the money. I'm willing to give it everything I have because I can. <sup>SD</sup>

One of the most celebrated radical art groups in the U.S. during the late 1960s and existed until the late 1970s was the Guerilla Art Action Group (GAAG). It was composed of two artists, Jon Hendricks and Jean Toche (1978), who were able to stage public performances in museums, offices, streets and government offices as acts of protest against art, social and political issues. "Art today is the highest symbol of the dehumanized process of business. Artists have become the celebrated buffoons of society's manipulators." (Hendricks & Toche, 1978: n.p.) More artists had eventually joined them in some of their major performance art pieces in New York. Notably, by expressing their sentiments through their art, GAAG was successful in putting their messages across, got the attention of those in power and stirred consciousness among the public.

Most participants in this study who represented diverse class and gender categories expressed hope and optimism about the fact that many artists, regardless of their genre and discipline, are committed to social change. Linton (mid, female artist), summarized this belief by citing two noted Canadian artist activists who were earlier discussed in the preceding section.



I think there's certainly a potential to have more artist activists in our midst, especially here in Canada. Rebecca Belmore is one example of an aboriginal woman artist who represented Canada at the Venice Biennale. Artists like her raise issues, very important issues about the aboriginal community in Canada using art. Brian Yungen was another one. They don't have access to the same economic and political power that everyone else does. That is where I think the art community serves the best. <sup>JL</sup>

Lucie-Smith remarked that the world of art has become an important forum for the expression of minority views (Lucie-Smith, 1996). Homosexual artists have taken as much advantage of this as have various ethnic minorities (368). Balkind(1983) shared the same view by stating that members of the gay and lesbian movement have made their presence in art, who, together with blacks, women, native societies, are determined to reveal themselves to be deserving of respect as members of the human race. (41) RB (mid, male artist) argued that this art as activism is a useful form of communication and social change.

I think just people seeing how other people live, and seeing what other people's experiences are, can effect social change. I know as a gay artist, when straight people have to confront my work, it can change the way, because maybe they know me as a person or they find out what kind of a person I am and see what kind of work I do and maybe it changes their opinion about gay people and makes us less threatening to them or makes them realize that we're just like everyone else, you know. So I think in that sense, art can change society. It helps communicate people's stories and helps bring those stories to other people who maybe wouldn't be open to them in some other level. <sup>RB</sup>

Under capitalism, commercial art thrived where the field of advertising, for instance, had served as a niche for some artists who excelled in graphic arts or photography. While it has become a lucrative opportunity for some artists, the more politicized research participants shared these views, stating that "I think advertising has a scary capacity to engender social change. These people spend a

lot of time thinking about how people think and what they react to and I think there's a lot of power there." <sup>SM</sup> "As soon as you start engaging corporations, they're controlling the message." <sup>AB</sup> VY (mid, male artist) noted that information or image overload as a result of advertising campaign in all media can distract viewers, meaning that even the most urgent social justice can get lost in a sea of images.

We're obviously bombarded by it on a daily basis. It might even control in a bad way. I just think there's so much information out there that people are becoming garbled. People don't seem to know the messages anymore. I try to wonder if there's still a message. People are just speaking and texting for the sake of it. <sup>VY</sup>

One of the most insightful perspectives that some of the research participants indicated was that they were willing to forego commercial success for the sake of having integrity as part of the struggles of social justice which was seen to provide its own rewards. VY (mid, male artist) felt contented when asked about his current lifestyle and struggles as an artist.

"No life like it. You know what, it's a great life. It's a struggle but it's a great life. It would be nice to be rich and famous but it won't kill me if I'm not. I think we live a very traditional artist's lifestyle. I probably make five thousand, six thousand dollars a year for 10 to 15 years." <sup>VY</sup>

The totality of being an artist seemed to provide many rewards and consequences. DJ (mid, female artist) has highlighted what artists can do and what their art can serve for the betterment of society.

I think where you come from, is who you are and that's the language that you speak. And mine being an artist is to translate what I see and bring that vision out to the world. <sup>DJ</sup>

## SUMMARY /CONCLUSION

This thesis explored eleven artists' perspectives on the question, if artists need to survive within the realm of capitalism without compromising their vision for social change, what must they do in order to preserve their relative creative autonomy? The thesis also asked whether visual artists have given up partially or totally their relative creative autonomy in exchange of economic freedom. Eleven visual artists from diverse financial, class, age and gender categories contributed their perspectives on the themes of relative creative autonomy, economic freedom, function of art and creative activism. The data and literature seemed to suggest that under present conditions, gatekeepers have the power to control artists and their art in the art market. Leaders of state bureaucracy, galleries, museums, curators, dealers, collectors, auction houses, conglomerates and big corporations are deemed as gatekeepers. The art market is the playing field of the gatekeepers where the principle of stock market is applied in the economic valuation of art.

The data also suggests that an alienating relationship exists between gatekeepers and artists in the art market. Limited options seem to be available to artists when economic freedom, also known as commercial success, is pursued. Less financially successful artists seemed to retain greater creative autonomy but with little or no economic returns. In contrast, financially successful artists seemed to apportion some or all of their artistic control in exchange for



‘economic freedom.’ This is a ‘catch 22’ for artists because “art persists in remaining the exclusive plaything of the very rich.”(Cork,1979:1)

Artists who pursue economic freedom tend to enter into a relation of exploitation with gatekeepers. This relation calls for artists to yield much of their relative creative autonomy when their art becomes commodified in the art market. Just like their art, artists become objects of capitalism. “The role of the artist is merely a labourer and his product belongs to the capitalist.” (Ferne, 1995: 273)

Data indicated that artists continue to struggle in keeping their relative creative autonomy because of economic challenges. Many artists cannot practice their art full time because there is no adequate financial and moral support available to sustain their work. Gatekeepers seemed to control access to the art market. Society’s continuing indifference towards the art community pushes artists and their art into the periphery, building a cold and distant wall between them. Much of society seem to view art as trivial, believing that artists should not get compensated for creating art in the same way that other skilled work is compensated and instead expecting artists to give their art for free.

Society and gatekeepers are major factors that encourage artists to pursue economic freedom through commercial, rather than non-profit endeavour. In order to protect their creative sphere, many artists retreat from society, producing art for themselves rather than for others. While it may be solitary, it may also be a revolutionary strategy that enhances more control and focus on the

artists' vision rather than pursuing society for validation and economic rewards. Thus, a new concept of the function of art; "art for my sake," emerged from this research.

"Art for my sake" illustrates how artists assert their self-directed will and agency for their own purpose without seeking affirmation from others. The concept of "art for my sake" may sound individualistic and tend to suggest a non-socialist nature of self-advancement; but at the same time, this concept serves as a means for artists to have the space to work in a less constrained atmosphere.

Data suggested that some artists are willing to let go of economic freedom just to uphold their relative creative autonomy. Lack of access to the art market prompts artists to find other means of subsistence not just for survival but also for the continuance of their art. In as much as artists desire to be self-sufficient economically and creatively, to be relatively autonomous is likely to embrace the proverbial *précis* of society as 'starving artists' and live the creative avowal in poverty. "Equally, it is an illusion that the arts are, or should be, mainly associated with comfort, or with making life more comfortable." (Smiers, 2003: 47)

The data and literature suggest that activism in the arts can happen when artists utilize their art to take on important issues that affect society. They believe that art is a powerful tool to effect social change. Creative activism can also happen when artists initiate collective action with other artists in order to unite their vision. Whether artists take their stance individually or collectively, it

is important to point out that “art is eternally disturbing, permanently revolutionary... and the artist is the upsetter of the established order.” (Read, 1967: 24)

The data indicates that there seems to be a correlation between society’s perception of artists and the educational system set up for people to understand and appreciate their art. Most practicing artists are mostly capable of teaching art programs because of their creative experiences, knowledge and skills. However, the current school system offers very limited opportunities for them in terms of teaching and mentoring the students. This educational component seems to have been delegated to instructors with little or no artistic practice. “Art and creativity have a place in creating dynamic places and in shaping the exchange of knowledge, stories and information.” (Kukacka, 2006: 122)

In the face of economic challenge under capitalism, some visual artists have found ways to uphold their creative autonomy while protecting their vision for social change. More research is needed to further explore strategies artists use to build social change. As a new function of art, the concept of “art for my sake” also opens a new portal for future exploration which may draw a parallel with artists who pursue an unhampered vision instrumental for social change. Potentially, a follow up study could be more inclusive to involve a diverse sampling of practicing visual artists in our midst.



## THESIS PARTICIPANTS

(With permission from some participants to include their real names and identities)

**TCA, Anderson, Tobey C.** A socio-political male visual artist living in St. Catharines whose works deals with war and conflict. He had been producing and exhibiting artworks professionally since 1969. He served as Director of the Niagara Artists Centre in 1990 and then at the Kingston Artists Association Inc., now known as the Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre. He was born, grew up and was schooled in the United States and immigrated to Canada in 1975 where he became a dual citizen. He recently initiated CRAM, Canada's smallest gallery and artist collective. Interviewed on August 13, 2009.

**RB, a.k.a. 'Bateman, Robert'** A male visual artist whose works are based on sculpture and installation. He worked various part time jobs for 22 years in order to support his art career. "Lucky financial circumstances" allowed him to move to Hamilton from Toronto and retire early to become a full-time artist. He has a Masters degree in Fine Arts from York University. Currently, he is being represented by a private gallery. Interviewed on June 12, 2009.

**AB, a.k.a. 'Barnes, Ann'** A female visual artist whose works specialize in printmaking. She worked full time as librarian for 22 years at the Archives of Ontario and then at McGill University. When she was diagnosed with multi-sclerosis 12 years ago, she stopped working and became a full time artist. She studied Fine Arts at Concordia University in 1979 and has a Masters degree in Library Science from University of Western Ontario. Currently, she is being represented by a private gallery. Interviewed on July 3, 2009.

**LG, a.k.a. 'Guess, Leslie'** A female visual artist who uses symbolism, illusionism, and animal imagery in her works done on found furniture or functional wooden objects. She worked as arts administrator at the Carnegie Gallery in Dundas and then at Hamilton Artists Inc. Currently, she teaches and facilitates various art programmes,

including Artists at the Centre. She received an Honors B.A. in Art and Art History from McMaster University in 1986. Interviewed on June 22, 2009.

**SD, Davis, Susan.** A female visual artist whose professional career spans 35 years. She is a master calligrapher from Toronto Calligraphers Guild teaching, creating stained glass windows and making large scale interior architectural pieces. She graduated with a Bachelor of Independent Studies in Fine Art and Psychology from University of Waterloo, went to New School of Art in Toronto and then pursued a Masters Degree in Art as Applied Medicine program at University of Toronto but dropped out halfway through. She also went to Divinity College. She is currently self-employed and works on spiritual and pastoral art projects. Interviewed on June 9, 2009.

**DJ, a.k.a. 'Jones, Denise'** A female visual artist residing in Burlington whose works are figurative and reflects on spiritual and religious influences. She taught for twelve years in the "Artist-in-the-Classroom" program and lectured as a Portrait Artist at Brock University. She is continuing towards earning a BFA at McMaster University. Interviewed on June 19, 2009.

**JL, Linton, Jennifer.** A contemporary feminist visual artist living in Toronto with 17 years of professional art experience. Her works reflect her personal experiences filtered through the lens of art history, mythology and popular culture. She worked full time as graphic designer while pursuing her feminist art on a part-time basis. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree from University of Toronto and a Fine Arts Diploma from Sheridan College. Currently, she is pursuing her Masters in Fine Arts (MFA) degree at York University. Interviewed on July 17, 2009.

**MM, MacDonald, Melanie.** A female visual artist living in St. Catharines whose paintings is done in photo realism to "arrest time for the sake of contemplating the transient nature of our lives." She is an active member of the Niagara Artists' Centre and the CRAM collective. She graduated from Brock University in 2000 with a combined Honours BA in English and Visual Art. She has participated in group and solo

exhibitions in the Niagara Region, Northern Ontario, and Quebec. Interviewed on August 13, 2009.

**SM, Mazza, Steve.** A male visual artist who has been practicing his art professionally for nine years. Using clay, his art dwells on fairytale fabled type of idea in mundane and awkward settings. He works full time as a scenic painter and works part-time as artist in his studio. He attended the University of Toronto and Sheridan College's collaborative Art and Art History Program, earning an Honours Specialist Degree in Art and Art History. He worked as Programming Director for Hamilton Artists Inc. Currently, he is being represented by a private gallery. Interviewed on June 15, 2009.

**VY, a.k.a. 'Young, Victor'** A male visual artist activist whose works are imbued with visceral urgency. He works full time as a scenic painter and works part-time in his art studio. He is a vocal community member who rallied to protest art-related issues. He served as president and vice-president for the Hamilton Artists Inc. Board of Directors. He received an Honors B.A. in Art and Art History from McMaster University in 1986. Interviewed on June 22, 2009.

**CW, Wren, Carolyn.** A female visual artist based in St. Catharines whose works use relief print methods and processes in non-traditional ways to create installations. She has been investigating the history, language, and artistry of maps for 5 years. She has co-curated a number of projects. She served as Treasurer and President on the Niagara Artists' Centre Board of Directors and currently a member of the CRAM Collective. She studied art at the University of Western Ontario. Interviewed on August 13, 2009.



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## APPENDIX: A

### RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: **ARTIST AND HIS/HER ART IN SOCIETY:  
CREATIVE WORK FOR SOCIAL CHANGE**

**Student Investigator:** Joyne Lavides  
M.A. Candidate, Labour Studies  
McMaster University  
Hamilton, Ontario L8S 4M4  
(905) 296 5447  
[lavidej@mcmaster.ca](mailto:lavidej@mcmaster.ca)

**Faculty Supervisor:** Dr. Donna, Baines, Ph.D.  
Professor, Labour Studies  
McMaster University  
Hamilton, Ontario L8S 4M4  
(905) 525 9140 ext. 23703  
[bainesd@mcmaster.ca](mailto:bainesd@mcmaster.ca)

#### Purpose of the Study

In this study, I want to find out the current role of artists and his/her art in society. Your participation is voluntary in nature and you are given the opportunity to talk about your experiences and ideas. You have the option to refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without any consequence. The risks and benefits of this study had been outlined in this form and you are free to discuss any questions or concerns you may have about this study with the investigator listed above.

#### What will happen during the study?

During the study, Joyne Lavides will be conducting a one-on-one interview where she will be asking questions about your art profession, your bodies of work, some demographic information like your age and education, and your views on issues about creative control and the role of artists and his/her art in society. A list of interview guides will be provided to you prior to the interview time. The interview is allotted for just two hours and it will be done one time only for the duration of

this study. The interview will be scheduled and held at a location that is preferable and convenient for you. Notes, tape recordings, videos and photographs will be taken during the interview. The interview will be recorded on audiotape and then transcribed. You have the right to turn off the tape recorder at any point in the interview and slow or end the interview. You have the right to contact the researcher after the interview and ask that any portion of the interview or the interview in its entirety be removed from the study. In this situation, the tape, any notes and any copies of transcriptions will be destroyed by Joyne Lavides.

You are encouraged to take time in answering the questions. You can refuse to answer if you wish; you can stop the interview to think things over; or you can withdraw entirely from the interview and study.

### **Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts:**

It is not likely that there will be any harms or discomforts associated with this study. There may be a possibility of unforeseen harm, but there are minimal risks involved, including regret and embarrassment over the revelation of your personal information as a result of the interview.

You do not need to answer questions that may make you uncomfortable or that you do not want to answer. In the event that you feel upset by the interview or need further support, please inform Joyne Lavides who will assist you in finding the appropriate agency for professional debriefing or counseling.

### **What good things could happen if I participate?**

The study may not benefit you directly but we hope that what we will learn from your participation in this study will help us understand more about the current status and the problems faced by artists at the present time. Furthermore, the artists and the art community may benefit from having a better understanding of what other artists like you have done, past and present.

### **Confidentiality:**

Confidentiality will be respected. You will not be identified as a study participant in any reports or publications of this research. The investigator, Joyne Lavides, can provide you with an alias if you prefer or you can supply an alias that will be used in place of your name for the duration of the research project. Anything that we find out about you that could identify you will not be published or told to anyone else, unless we get your permission.

Your privacy will be respected. The information obtained by Joyne Lavides will be kept for two years. Interview tapes and transcriptions will be kept in a locked file cabinet. The investigator is the only one who will have access to these. Since these materials could potentially be used in the future for publication and documentary purposes, all tapes, notes, transcripts, videos and photos will be stored by the investigator for two years after the completion of the study. All participants will be informed if these materials will in fact be used for said purpose. If not, these materials will be destroyed two years after the storage time has elapsed.

### **What if I change my mind about participating in the study?**

Your participation in this study is voluntary in nature and it is your choice to participate or not. If you decide to participate, you have the option of stopping at any time, even after signing the consent form or part-way through the study. If you do not want to answer some of the questions, you do not have to, but you can still be in the study. If you decide to stop participating, there will be no consequences to you. In cases of withdrawal, any data you have provided to that point will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise.

### **Information About the Study Results:**

You may obtain information about the results of the study by contacting Joyne Lavides at Labour Studies Graduate Department Office, Kenneth Taylor Hall, Room 717, McMaster University.

### **Rights of Research Participants**

If you have any questions, concerns or require more information about the study itself, please contact the investigator, Joyne Lavides, at the address and number above.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, you may contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat  
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142  
c/o Office of Research Services  
E-mail: [ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca)



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## **CONSENT**

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by JOYNE LAVIDES, of McMaster University. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study, and to receive any additional details I wanted to know about the study. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time, if I choose to do so, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

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Name & Signature of Participant

## APPENDIX: B

### ARTIST INTERVIEW GUIDE

- 1. How many years have you been practicing as an artist?**
  - a) Do you work full-time or part-time as an artist?
  - b) Have you received pay or remuneration for your work?
  - c) How would you describe this pay?
  
- 2. Describe the art genre that you have been working on throughout your creative career.**
  - a) What themes does your art reflect?
  - b) Who is its main audience?
  
- 3. How much creative control do you have in your bodies of work?**
  - a) Where are your bodies of work now?
  - b) What has permitted this creative control?
  
- 4. What are your thoughts about the economic value that is being designated by the art market in each artist's work?**
  - a) What economic valuation does your work hold?
  - b) Is this a fair valuation in your opinion? Why/ Why not?

5. **Can you reflect on ‘Art for art’s sake’ and ‘Art for a purpose’?**
  - a) Is there one concept or do both concepts apply to your work?
6. **Do you think that art must effect social change for the benefit of society?**
  - a) Can works that are art created for art’s sake do this?
  - b) Can commercial art enact social change?
7. **Do you consider yourself and your art as an instrument of social change?**
  - a) If so, how? How not?
  - b) Have you worked as a commercial artist? Why or Why not? Would you ever?
8. **Is there anything you think I should have asked or that you would like to add?**



# McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB)

c/o Office of Research Services, MREB Secretariat, GH-305/H, e-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

## CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS CLEARANCE TO INVOLVE HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

Application Status: New ☒ Addendum ☐ Renewal ☐ Project Number 2009 075

### TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT:

The Artists and His/Her Art in Society: Creative Work for Social Change

Faculty Investigator (s)/ Supervisor(s)	Dept./Address	Phone	E-Mail
D. Baines	Labour Studies	23703	bainesd@mcmaster.ca
Student Investigator(s)	Dept./Address	Phone	E-Mail
J. Lavides	Labour Studies	905-296-5447	lavidej@mcmaster.ca

The application in support of the above research project has been reviewed by the MREB to ensure compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the McMaster University Policies and Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants. The following ethics certification is provided by the MREB:

- ☒ The application protocol is approved as presented without questions or requests for modification.  
☐ The application protocol is approved as revised without questions or requests for modification.  
☐ The application protocol is approved subject to clarification and/or modification as appended or identified below:

**COMMENTS AND CONDITIONS:** Ongoing approval is contingent on completing the annual completed/status report. A "Change Request" or amendment must be made and approved before any alterations are made to the research.

Reporting Frequency:

Annual:

Other:

Date: May 19/09 Dr. D. Maurer, Chair/ Dr. D. Pawluch, Vice-chair:

Acting Vice-chair  
T. Moffat