

Refining Understandings of Entrepreneurial Artists Valuing the Creative Incorporation of Business and Entrepreneurship into Artistic Practice

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ABSTRACT: There is a disconnect between artists' applications of entrepreneurial behavior in their practice and evaluations of artists as productive members of community. Informed by interviews with Nashville-based artists, this study investigates how artists understand their creativity, artistic practice, and approaches to entrepreneurship in the context of an artistically oriented community. The results demonstrate that artists engage in entrepreneurial behavior by deploying creativity in multiple domains, including art, business, and the social, with their skills in each being important in preserving the motives of their artistic practice. The findings highlight artists as multifaceted creatives capable of transforming their practices through entrepreneurial pursuits. **KEYWORDS:** entrepreneurial artists, arts entrepreneurship, domains of creativity, the business of art, artists in community.

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Introduction

Creativity and innovation are valuable assets for the development of communities, cities, and economies (Borén & Young, 2013; Florida, 2002; Jackson, 2012). Though the concept of the city as a creative hub is not new to this decade, the full extent of the role of creativity in development processes is still being explored (Krätke, 2011). Psychological research has determined that creativity is not limited to the arts and is instead multifaceted (James & Asmus, 2001). While creativity is no longer predicated on the idea of the “creative genius” or thought to be limited only

to arts and culture, discourse around the most likely candidates to inject creativity into community development remains centered around artists.

Contemporary community-development practices often fix the role of placemaker on local artists, with guidelines for best practices in creative placemaking—the process of developing communities around arts and cultural activities—highlighting the importance of artist-led projects (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010; Nicodemus, 2013). However, there is limited knowledge about how artists—especially artists engaged in arts entrepreneurship—understand their role, influence, and potential to expand their practices in their communities. Placemaking, like creative city development, is a collaborative process predicated on hierarchical distributions of power, where the perceptions and interests of the institutional regime and other elites ultimately dictate the direction development projects will take (Carr, 2012). While artists may be recruited or invited to lead community development initiatives, they are often only one actor working in collaboration with several other partners, including the community, local government, and various funding-support organizations. These arrangements may compromise the environmental stimulants, including agentic freedom, cooperation, and recognition, that factor into the ability of artists to exercise both their creativity and their entrepreneurship (Amabile, 1996).

The present study is an inquiry into artists' applications of entrepreneurship within the contexts of independent, professional art practice, in order to better understand how business-minded artists or artists who have perceived a need for business skills deploy entrepreneurial behavior to impact their creative output. Using community as a lens, we investigate the role of environmental and structural constraints in influencing the entrepreneurial decision-making of artists, where artists are defined as those working primarily in self-employed, small-business, or nonprofit capacities. Where extant literature has focused on the self-actualization of communities through art (Vazquez, 2012), this study examines how artists self-actualize their place in community through the vehicle of entrepreneurial training and arts entrepreneurship. We argue that there is a disconnect between artists' applications of entrepreneurial behavior in their practice and evaluations of artists as productive members of their communities. In refining the definition of the entrepreneurial artist, we seek to reframe considerations of how artists, as multifaceted creatives, use entrepreneurialism to advance their practices and career trajectories. In doing so, our work seeks to interpret the decision-making logics of entrepreneurial pursuits that fall within two intersections noted in the taxonomy of arts entrepreneurship introduced by Beckman and Essig (2012): habits of mind and practice, and venture creation and practice.

Perspectives of Entrepreneurship in and around Artists

Arts Entrepreneurship

Contemporary understandings of artistic process—specifically, how artists incorporate or perform entrepreneurship in their professional practice—have shifted to reflect new parameters of workforce participation and success in a cultural industry characterized by a nontraditional

work structure. Where entrepreneurialism was once defined as the undertaking of business activity in the face of uncertainty, contemporary definitions have expanded to include characteristics such as the ability to recombine disparate skills to navigate change and challenges (Chang & Wyszomirski, 2015; Scherdin & Zander, 2011; White, 2015).

Entrepreneurial behavior is an expectation for freelance workers and other individuals embedded in cultural industry (Lingo & Tepper, 2013; Win, 2014). Expectations of an artist's ability to perform entrepreneurship necessitates new ventures into entrepreneurial training or skill development. Arts entrepreneurship, specifically, has been defined as a process through which artists convert various means, such as resources and skills, to desirable ends (Chang & Wyszomirski, 2015; Essig, 2015). A key differential of arts entrepreneurship from entrepreneurship in other sectors is the diversity of reasons that motivate its pursuit. Motivations behind arts entrepreneurship may include the desire to profit off of talent or skill, to maintain creative control over the artistic process, to address perceived deficits in the cultural fabric of a community, or to involve community members in the creative process (Essig, 2015; Phillips, 2011). Arts entrepreneurship may also be motivated by occupational or social precarity, causing artists to critically evaluate their location, their peers, and their own actions as resources towards stability and success (Cornfield, 2015).

Training an Entrepreneurial Artist

The practice of art is frequently associated with and characterized by precarity; a structurally determined condition that encourages the implementation of entrepreneurship as a means of helping artists navigate challenges associated with the business of artmaking for professional-personal or community-based practice. Programs designed to train artists in the business of art and arts entrepreneurship strive to enable artists to self-intervene in “overcoming common challenges and historical barriers to the production, distribution, exhibition and preservation of art” (White, 2015). Unlike training in non-arts entrepreneurship, which seeks to help participants transform business ideas into actionable ventures, arts entrepreneurship is pedagogically framed as a means of generating or supporting projects that sustain an artist's practice and creativity. Pedagogy on training artists to exercise their entrepreneurial capacity commonly accommodates what arts professionals consider to be the primary driver of arts entrepreneurship: the artist's innate ability and willingness to engage with creative thinking and practices (Pollard & Wilson, 2014).

Entrepreneurial training programs developed for artists outside of the school context emphasize the importance of developing traditional business skills such as business planning, creating a marketing strategy, financial management, network building, and legal competency. Examples of such programs include the Arts & Business Council of Greater Nashville's program *Periscope: Artist Entrepreneur Training*, The Artist Entrepreneur LAB designed by Catherine Orer, the *Artist as an Entrepreneur Institute* by ArtServe, and the Center for Cultural Innovation's series *The Business of Art: Entrepreneurial Training for Artists*. Training in arts entrepreneurship has been framed by several of these programs, including *Periscope*, the LAB, and

the Artist as an Entrepreneur Institute, as a fundamental piece of an artist's considerable skillset, joining with artistic skill and creativity to transform practices, shift mindsets, and help artists make a living with their art. Training programs and traditional classroom experiences in arts entrepreneurship emphasize an "arts entrepreneurial mindset" that is strongly aligned with elements of traditional business acumen: the ability to collaborate, possession of highly developed communication skills, and the ability to think strategically and analytically about one's own creativity and creative products (Pollard & Wilson, 2014, p. 3).

Conceptualizing Practices of Arts Entrepreneurship

While the volume of literature on entrepreneurial training and skill provision for artists has been expanding, less is known about the ways in which artists actively perform and engage with entrepreneurship in their professional practices, or how artists creatively adopt or adapt entrepreneurial behavior to suit motivations unique to their personal careers. Research into the translation of entrepreneurial mindsets into appropriate applications of hard and soft skills in the context of a professional arts practice aligns with the argument that "all members of an artworld utilize entrepreneurial thinking to guide diverse forms of entrepreneurial actions (or behavior)" (White, 2019, p. 50).

Artists have been framed as "bohemian entrepreneurs," a conceptualization of artists that emphasizes individual performance, devotion to work, and freedom of production within the "entrepreneurial practice of risk taking, allocation of individual creative resources and self-marketing" (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2006, p. 235). As bohemian entrepreneurs, artists use their creativity to help them preserve the pursuit of art for art's sake, without being made to feel as though they have mined their creativity in the interest of satisfying markets or clientele (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2006). The concept and practice of bohemian entrepreneurship neatly encapsulates three of the four primary motivations for engaging with arts entrepreneurship identified by Toscher, Dahle, and Steinert (2020). These three motivations—to give, give something to society; to make, make a product independent of its reward; and to live, to provide one's self with a good life—bring the character and practice of bohemian entrepreneurship into alignment with the description of professional artists presented by Vazquez (2012, p. 13):

They demand the same things as all other businesses—ready access to consumers, suppliers and resources; a healthy, affordable climate for developing their goods and services; and connections to a supportive community of peers, other businesspeople and leaders.

Regardless of motivation, artists require tools and support, just like any other business venturers.

Still, the effectuating entrepreneur adopts a more intrinsic approach by using their skills to self-initiate entrepreneurial activity. Where a traditional business may initiate with a process of tool-seeking, an effectuate entrepreneur in the arts may first engage in the identification and pursuit of opportunity, encouraged by their ability to create opportunity in the seeming absence

of it (Sarasvathy, 2001). In contrast to Vazquez's (2012) conceptualization of professional artists, which celebrates the artist's role in the business of art by recognizing that artist demands align with the conditional requirements of any business venture, effectuating approaches to arts entrepreneurship account for the artist's above average creativity across multiple domains, including the arts, business and entrepreneurial pursuits, and civic and community engagement.

The study and identification of arts entrepreneurship as an element of artistic practice partially depends on recognition of the ways in which individual artists engage in processes of self-management and self-actualization while producing art (Beckman & Essig, 2012). As entrepreneurs, professional artists must reconcile their entrepreneurial identity with their artistic one by accepting that their creativity and skill in the production of art is intimately tied to feelings of satisfaction or fulfillment as an artist, as well as to professional and financial success (Bass, Milosevic, & Eesley, 2015). The concept of the "artist-producer . . . an individual who makes her work and cultivates the conditions to bring her work to anticipated markets" (Bonin-Rodriguez, 2012, p. 15), synthesizes components of bohemian and effectuating entrepreneurship. It encapsulates a freedom of production in the organizational sense by asserting that artists have the capacity to outsource jobs as needed through their identity as producer hyphenates. At the same time, it recognizes that artists are often required to create their own opportunities.

The possibilities of arts entrepreneurship, when executed within the specific context of a community or local practice, are amplified by the same decision-making process that characterizes effectuate entrepreneurship. While many artists have proven themselves capable of adopting new forms of practice to suit institutionalized requirements, a different approach, one informed by artists' perceptions of available means and circumstances, the possibilities or constraints associated with a project's execution, and risk calculation, opens up new possibilities for entrepreneurial skill recognition and development (Sarasvathy, 2001). As such, we seek to refine past definitions of the artist-entrepreneur—"individuals that achieve artistic and financial success by creating their own business of selling their artwork" (Bass et al., 2015, p. 99)—by arguing that entrepreneurship is a creative domain that enhances an artist's creative identity and activities once unlocked. We assert that being an entrepreneurial artist is less an exercise in identity management, and more a practice of amplifying secondary skillsets with the goal of preserving intrinsic motivations important to the spirit of the artist's practice.

Applying Arts Entrepreneurship to Community Contexts

Arts entrepreneurship is motivated by a wide range of goals and environmental or organizational conditions (Sarasvathy, 2001; Toscher et al., 2020). However, the breadth of reasons artists have for engaging in entrepreneurial behavior, and how those reasons may or may not align with public conceptualizations about art production or occupations in the arts, contributes to public misconceptions about the motivations of artists and arts entrepreneurship in the context of community. A recent study of public perceptions of artists in communities found that over 40 percent of adults in the United States who reported having interacted with artists within their local communities saw artists as bringing attention to community concerns or causes, with

ARTIVATE 10.1

roughly 25 percent describing artists as both finding new ways to solve problems and representing or serving as a spokesperson for the people, respectively (Novak-Leonard & Skaggs, 2017, p. 15). These findings suggest that community members value artists for the same reasons that artists are considered irreplaceable partners in targeted community development initiatives. Even so, when asked to provide a primary description of the artists they interacted with, the most common response given by survey respondents was that artists seek to earn money—a response that diminishes the contributions of artists to community by discounting the financial costs associated with the production of their work and value of their skillsets and labor (Novak-Leonard & Skaggs, 2017).

The normalization of artists as “social entrepreneurs” who “revitalize cities not only through their bottom line but also through their social role” (Stern & Seifert, 2010, p. 262) is a potentially harmful reduction of the complex, entrepreneurial decision making that occurs when artists who are invested in community by virtue of being members of it integrate elements of community into their practice, whether to use their art as a tool for community development, or to use the community as a tool to amplify their art. The philosophy of art for art’s sake, which originated as an attempt to “insulate art from the demands that it be useful” (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras, & Brooks, 2004, p. 38) is directly opposed to the demands placed on creative products either produced within or that have been influenced by the context of community. It also contradicts an important, perhaps secondary, function of art: its capacity to maintain, through its sale, an artist’s ability to sustain their life and their practice (Scott & Bruce, 1994).

It is possible that the present conditions of contemporary artworlds necessitates that artists become increasingly comfortable with negotiating the creative use of entrepreneurial skills as a means of protecting themselves and their work from becoming defrauded by environmental conditions outside of their control. However, many independent arts practitioners operate without clear organizational structures, which limits their ability to attack (White, 2019) or change institutional circumstances, such as access to funds, that constrain or are counterintuitive to the goals of their artistic practice. Though the value of art in community revitalization efforts has been increasingly recognized by government entities in recent years, the structure under which these efforts are carried out has raised questions about the ability of artists to successfully insert themselves into formalized community development processes, despite demonstrated interests in engaging in socially motivated work (Jackson, 2012). Artists made vulnerable by the conditions of their labor market but still desiring to produce large-scale works may find themselves overburdened by grant-funded projects like creative placemaking initiatives that require the use of their time, talent, and efforts, but misemploy their expertise during key moments of collaboration or negotiation between the artist and the institutional managers of grant funds (Frenette, 2017).

Methodology

The artists interviewed for this study are based in Nashville, Tennessee, which has a global reputation as the birthplace of country music and also provides context for capturing insights into artists' approaches to their practice in response to steady, average growth as well as periods of rapid growth. Neighborhood redevelopment and an influx of new residents have brought excitement and opportunity, as well as persistent challenges of affordability and preservation of place, to Nashville. Approximately eighty-four people moved to the area per day between July 2017 and July 2018 (Reicher, 2019). The population of the Nashville-Davidson Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) was nearly two million in 2017, comparable in size to the Columbus and Cleveland, Ohio MSAs and the San Jose MSA in California (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Nashville's development trajectory has exerted a range of conditions upon the artists living and working in the city, and our respondents provide insight into how artists and their practices are affected by these changes. For example, artists in our study who are local to Nashville or who have lived in Nashville for many years cited concerns over the rising cost of living. Artists newer to the Nashville area recalled being drawn there by both the vibrant art scene and lower cost of living compared to art hubs such as New York, Los Angeles, or Chicago. Thus, the experiences of professional artists in Nashville offer insights to the experiences of professional artists living across the country, be they in places of rapid growth or areas of relative stability.

For its sample, this study looks at artists who participated in the Arts & Business Council of Greater Nashville's Periscope: Artist Entrepreneur Training program (Periscope).¹ Periscope is a year-long professional development opportunity that provides eight weeks of intensive in-classroom training, one-on-one mentorship with a business mentor, and exposure opportunities—most notably through the culminating public event, the Periscope Pitch. The program was initiated in 2014 and is ongoing. Topics covered by Periscope include learning to set achievable goals and project ideations, building and selling unique propositions using information gleaned from audience evaluations, framing concepts in a variety of contexts in order to maximize their potential, building marketing plans, understanding pricing strategies and developing long-term business plans, networking with audiences, investors, and other artists, and learning to pitch creative endeavors. Periscope participants also benefit from opportunities to network and exchange ideas with peers in other disciplines. Periscope cohorts range from nineteen to twenty-five participants in size, with the average cohort being twenty-one participants. Program costs are subsidized by the Arts & Business Council of Greater Nashville's funders and program partners, with participants being responsible for two hundred and fifty dollars in attendance and material fees as of 2021. Scholarships to cover program fees are available. All past and then-current participants of the Periscope program ($N = 105$ at time of study) were invited to participate in this study.

Periscope artists received an email from the Arts & Business Council of Greater Nashville

¹ More information about the Periscope program can be found at the following link: <https://abcnashville.org/periscope/>

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in mid-August of 2018 introducing the study, followed by email correspondence and in-person communication with the research team at the Arts & Business Council’s Annual Periscope Pitch Night event in September of 2018. In total, thirty-seven Periscope artists completed a preliminary online survey of creativity and personality indicators, as well as demographic information, for a 35.5 percent response rate. Respondents received a twenty-dollar Amazon voucher in compensation for their time. At the end of the survey, respondents were asked to indicate their willingness to participate in a one-hour, semi-structured interview. These interviews provided a closer look at how artists are shaping their careers and are the focus of this study.

The nature of the Periscope: Artist Entrepreneur Training program uniquely enabled the study of artists post-receipt and in the process of utilizing their intensive entrepreneurial and business-driven training, thus enabling this study to build upon and contribute to existing literature on the practices and constraints of professional artists. In total, twenty-four semistructured interviews were conducted with artists who had completed the Periscope program. Interviews were conducted in Nashville in semiprivate locations of the respondent’s choosing and were audio recorded with each subject’s written consent. Interview and survey respondents practice a wide array of art forms, with some engaged in multiple forms. Their practices span several genres of performance, visual, and craft art, including theater, painting, music, drawing or illustrating, pottery, 3D-making and sculpture, dance, poetry and spoken word, writing, photography, and film. A concerted effort was made to maximize the diversity of the interviewees based on demographic characteristics self-reported through the initial online survey. Table 1 summarizes how study participants self-identified in terms of race and attained education; further details are not provided due to the limits of the sample size, in the interest of protecting participants’ identities. All were aged between twenty-four and sixty-four.

Interviews were conducted September through October of 2018. Interviews averaged 55.51 minutes in length, ranging from 32.35 to 84.17 minutes. Interviewees were compensated for their time with a hundred-dollar Visa gift card. Transcribed interviews were initially coded in an open coding process, and then later coded line-by-line analytically in two separate rounds. Thematic categories were added, refined, and discarded during the analytic coding process.

Table 1. Summary of Study Participants’ Demographic Characteristics

	Survey Respondents (n=37)	Interviewees (n=24)
Race		
White	25 (68%)	14 (58%)
Black	7 (19%)	5 (21%)
Other Race	5 (13.5%)	5 (20.8%)
Education		
Graduate Degree	12 (32.4%)	8 (33.3%)

The semistructured interview guide is underpinned by three themes stemming from extant literature on conditions and relationships which motivate and effect arts entrepreneurship: 1) relationship between practice and location, used to consider environmental conditions that may present as barriers, burdens, or benefits to an artist's practice; 2) relationship between self and other artists, used to investigate artists' approaches to building and gaining connections to various types of networks; and 3) relationship between self and success, intended to capture specific actions and reactions to self-perceived successes, failures, or setbacks. Interviewees were also asked to define the entrepreneurial artist and explain the concept in their own words, for the purpose of helping us to develop a comprehensive understanding of how professional artists conceive of entrepreneurialism in their field. A cohesive definition of the entrepreneurial artist was constructed through an iterative coding process and refined over time, upon completion of the interviews. The complete semistructured interview guide is available upon request.

Creative Approaches to Arts Entrepreneurship

Gaining knowledge around how artists conceive of the business of art was critical for prefacing our understanding of the relationship between artistic and entrepreneurial creativity. Traditional business practices such as marketing, resource management, and product diversification are identifiable in the approaches taken by twenty-one out of twenty-four artists in our sample to building and sustaining their practice. Defining the business of art, one respondent said:

The business of art is invoicing, keeping track of your inventory, going through who owes you money, paying people, knowing how much you can pay someone before you have to give them a 1099 [tax form]. Social media, building a website, taking good images of the art that you're making. Learning, knowing how to apply for grants. Grant cycles, when things are due. Being really excellent at handling rejection. . . . And just being able to keep it all in perspective, in pursuit of a higher goal.

Despite listing the tasks associated with running her practice, this artist and others in our sample maintained that there is no singular business of art, just as there is no singular application of entrepreneurship to artistic practice. Several artists pushed back against the complete intertwining of art with business, believing that profit motives—both in the interests of excess or just getting by—increase the potential of artists to compromise their artistic integrity and burden their art. At the same time, artists acknowledge that the pursuit of “art for art's sake” is complicated by the reality of artmaking as an occupational choice, with the majority believing that art is feasible as a business if the intention remains grounded in the creative pursuit and meaning behind the work.

Artists utilize skills relevant to multiple domains of creativity, including art, business, and the social, to assist in their mobilization of entrepreneurial artistic endeavors. Our findings suggest that artists identify and utilize approaches traditionally associated with entrepreneurship, with artists' pursuits being limited only by the organizational deficits of the cultural industry

ARTIVATE 10.1

and difficulty translating business-training pedagogy into actionable arts applications. Interview participants relayed their ability to evaluate local arts markets for opportunities and recounted transforming their own practices to occupy market niches not just in products, but in sales strategies and pricing as well. After serving as an instructor for several community arts programs, one respondent noticed that the provided courses offered training only to an intermediate level, despite demand for advanced courses:

Nashville has an amazing number of community art programs but there's not a lot of infrastructure or education to cater to them after they kind of hit the ceiling on those programs. Which is one of my long-term goals. That building I said I bought, I bought to do that . . . I see that as being my next phase of investing in the Nashville community. And also creating more sustainable business for me . . . do it in a really fair equitable way but the same prices as a community intro to pottery class. You know, have a new next level or a new place to go.

This artist purchased a building where she intends to hold community classes for advanced students in order to meet a previously unfulfilled demand. In the interim, available rooms within the building are rented to other local artists as studio space, which defers the costs of ownership while simultaneously creating a new artist community and maximizing the potential of the building as a resource.

Our data suggest that the actions artists take to meet market demands for artistic products align with the actions one would take when seeking to expand their business. Four primary means of business expansion emerged from our interviews. While the first two means, reframing mentality and creation of own opportunity, align with previous research and conceptualizations of arts entrepreneurship, the third and fourth, diversification and targeting, fall within the realm of traditional understandings of non-arts entrepreneurship. By reframing their mentality towards their practice and thinking of their art as more of an active business practice rather than as work that should, theoretically, be profitable, our respondents became more prone to seeking, being open to, or self-originating opportunities that might magnify their impact in the local artworld.

Seven respondents mentioned curating shows or performances as a means of highlighting their work in the context of other, similarly themed pieces, using curation as a means of growing their audience, building a more expansive market, and engendering goodwill between artist peers. One artist interviewee, a painter, described the thought process behind inviting other artists to join him in displaying work at what had originally been booked as a solo gallery show:

Two things were in play. They had—I'd met these artists, seen their work, and [was] just really enamored with the fact I get to work with them. . . . And so I thought, well, having my work up would be really cool, really gratifying, but I want other people to see their stuff too. And I think it would be a better, a really cool mix. It would be better than just me. The other aspect that was in play was I had already scheduled a solo show for the next month. And so I knew that making enough work to fill that space would have been a physical challenge that probably would have been beyond what I could have done. So I thought, well, two birds with one stone.

This artist, like other interviewees in our sample, demonstrates that artists are multi-faceted creatives who engage in resource manipulation, marketing, sales, and workflow management to sustain their practices. In the case of the gallery show, the artist analyzed his resources and determined that he had insufficient time to make enough work for two solo gallery showings, which, along with his admiration for the work of peers in his network, motivated his decision to curate additional pieces for his show. Another interviewee, a stage director, recalled coordinating a similarly rapid redistribution of resources after an injury prevented her from completing the staging and direction of her own show. She describes adapting to adversity and the actions which led to the creation of a new—now long-running—theater festival:

We had a stage, it was booked, I knew that there were other women who had talent and things that they would like to share but they couldn't afford to rent the theater, hire a lighting designer and—but we had all that. And so I sent out an email to a bunch of women that I knew, and we got like, fifty responses. And that year we did the first women's work festival and we've been doing it ever since. . . . But it wasn't like this opportunity just presented itself. I had to figure out what to do because we couldn't do a show.

Stemming from the unforeseen circumstance of a sudden injury, this artist broadened the collective audience for her work by creating a new practice arm focused on curating and highlighting the works of her peers in addition to her own. Under less-than-ideal circumstances, artmaking occurred and was multiplied as a direct result of the artist's creativity in business and ability to recognize and create opportunity for others in the face of work-stopping injury.

Structural considerations and availability of resources presented other challenges for artists to creatively overcome. After losing access to production space and, consequently, the ability to engage in collaboration, a 3D-maker artist who specializes in glass blowing created a multipurposed initiative designed to take advantage of a public resource, sustain her creative spirit, and introduce local youth to the art of 3D-making:

When I don't have [large] studio access I don't engage in those collaborations because it's just, it's not really possible. So. I can try to do things in other ways. I'm about to start hopefully launching a program through the library doing collaborations with their high school youth and their 3D-makers, 3D-printmaking space there. And we'll print objects there and then we'll come [to her smaller maker's space] and I'll teach them how to make molds and we'll be doing some casting stuff here. So I'm really just kind of figuring out now how to get back into that space with what I have available to me here [in Nashville].

Teaching and diversifying approaches to artistic production were the only ways for this artist to continue any branch of her 3D-making practice upon losing access to the highly specialized production space required for her work. In the absence of affordable industrial space suited to the large scale of her productions, the artist utilized her entrepreneurial creativity to develop a practice more aligned to her circumstances: a teaching initiative that would grant both herself and her students access to a different tool and create new opportunities for making,

demonstrating this artist's entrepreneurial mentality around space, evaluation of resource availability, and diversification of practice.

Artist Entrepreneurs in the Context of Community

Conceptualizing the role of art and of artists, specifically, in community was polarizing for our interviewees. When asked about the role of art and artists in community, the majority of our respondents focused on the intrinsic benefits of art rather than on specific, artist-led community projects or even artist capacities or desires to engage in community development initiatives. The sentiment of these respondents is encapsulated as: artists can help their communities to "process their own experiences as human beings," with art as their medium for doing so. A fair number of artists in our sample cited concerns that prescribing roles to artists, be they real or imagined, puts an unfair burden and pressure on artistic creativity. One artist, a poet, expressed even further:

With artists, don't think there's any prescribed role. And I would push really hard against there being any because once you define that or assign some sort of specific role, I think by nature artists should push against it. And I mean, if I can get anywhere near a role, I would say it's to question, to change, and to offer alternatives. But even that feels kind of risky to assign a specific role. I think artists do a lot in a community. But I would not want to assign a role because that in itself would be antiartist in my mind.

Ultimately, the pushback we received from artists in our interview sample regarding the idea that artists have a "role" in or should be engaged directly with community through their practice is the nearest representation of "organizational attack" identified in our study (White, 2019).

Still, other artists in our interview sample demonstrate that community-engagement has the capacity to be a resource rich opportunity and creative approach to practice expansion. A quarter of our respondents were able to cite direct, intentional, and self-sought engagement with community via their artistic practice, with each project representing a different facet of entrepreneurial activity. The artists in our sample who chose to engage with community most commonly did so via community organizing, teaching, and partnering with nonprofits. The artist community organizer crafted a powerful tool from her writing practice and runs workshops designed to promote social cohesion and efficacy by bringing neighbors of different backgrounds together. Four of the ten artists who teach spoke of teaching specifically as a means of furthering arts education, appreciation, and exposure in their communities. The stage director whose entrepreneurship initiated a women's theater festival spoke of how the growth of the Nashville immigrant population and resulting racial-ethnic tensions inspired her to stage a play centered on the lives and stories of characters from different cultural and demographic backgrounds, to remind the audience that every individual is, like them, just trying to live a fruitful life. Another interviewee spoke of her work with various nonprofit organizations:

I don't think that handmade things should just be for rich people. . . . I've done a lot of work with the Nashville [nonprofit organization]. I used to take my students to paint murals in their garden that was designed, they got grant money to have gardens for refugee families from agrarian societies . . . we did a lot of projects around that space. We created murals, we helped create this big learning felt diagram that they could take into schools and teach about nutrition. I've partnered with a lot of organizations like that. Right now I'm working at [job training program].

This same artist, along with another artist in our sample and their craft artist collective, also organized a program where community members can check out pottery objects from their local library in the same way that one would check out a book, in order to make crafted objects more accessible to people with lower incomes. Another artist, an illustrator, collaborated with a well-known local songwriter to provide illustrations for a children's book, the proceeds of which were donated to charity. To him, the opportunity was multipurposed; it expanded his audience and professional network while allowing him to engage in a morally fulfilling act of service.

The artists in our interview sample frequently and creatively engage with business skills such as marketing, sales, and resource and workflow management to sustain their practice. Their artist entrepreneurialism is motivated by the desire to create and monetize art on their own terms, regardless of their motivation for making it. By implementing business strategies in their artist practice, artists in our sample have positioned themselves to maintain control of their input—their creativity—and their output, the art. While it is likely that the vast majority of artists seek to retain creative control during their production process, entrepreneurial artists are better positioned to actually do so, provided that structures beyond their control maintain accessible pathways to success.

One such pathway within the community context is monetary support. Artists in our sample recognize their capacity to creatively apply traditional business strategies to entrepreneurial opportunities. But like other businesses, professional artists require capital and support in order to grow their practice, despite their demonstrated ability to recognize or create new opportunities. Some of our respondents perceived funding opportunities contingent on the inclusion of “social good” or other community development components as limiting their artistic freedom and creative control—conditions not typically exerted on other private businesses. Three artists elaborated on the impact of these conditions on their practices, stating that they would prefer to practice art for art's sake and felt that funding contingencies influenced their practice and compromised artistic creativity:

If I was successful eventually as a business then I would consider like, what is my obligation to pay back and help the community? But otherwise, I'm not going to behave in a self-sacrificing way, in any way that I don't think other ordinary citizens should or would. So—and that's probably, not everybody's going to agree with me on that point. And I did make a great proposal about how to talk back to gentrification and I put it before the city and there was grant funding and they decided to put that funding elsewhere. And I have to make ends meet! So I'm going to spend my time on things that have to do with the vision that I've been developing throughout my life, my creative vision that I've been developing, and spend my money and time on things

ARTIVATE 10.1

that I think can help support me if I'm successful.

Community-level constraints chafe against artists' sense of ownership over the direction of their practice both as creatives, and as individuals deploying entrepreneurial skills as a means of gaining agency in the decision-making processes relevant to expanding their artistic practice. For the mixed-media artist quoted, entrepreneurship in the arts came down to points of decision-making within the context of opportunity recognition. Having seen that his efforts at engaging with community development opportunities were rejected for funding, this artist pivoted to the expansion and development of opportunities in other realms of his practice, including interactive galleries, art book prints, and digital projects. Other artists communicated similar desires to do public art, but cited restrictive and inflexible ordinances, concerns about their ability to maintain ownership of the work or idea—particularly in regard to large-scale works such as murals—and difficult entry into public art or creative placemaking grant awards as barriers to doing so. Despite being inherently community-oriented in their practice—building interactive exhibits for galleries, researching ways to embed poetry into public sidewalks—the fact that these artists identified the goals of community development grant holders and other institutional barriers as being incompatible with their creative process indicates that, for some artists, the entrepreneurial behaviors of recognizing opportunity and engaging in resource management are deliberate acts of decision-making designed to protect the original goals of their artistic practice.

Another artist who expressed frustration with funding contingencies recalled an instance of decision-making during which her small performing ensemble was made to reevaluate their personal and professional resources before ultimately reframing a project to include the community outreach component required to secure support from available grants:

Everything I think in terms of art and artists is kind of seen for me through the lens of if I want to be an artist or if I want to be—if I want to make music in this ensemble, I have to have funding and support to make it happen. And sometimes, you know, you have to kind of scoot a little bit over to do things like outreach and things like that, that match up with the funders' priorities. And I don't—we don't do it ever that its so far outside of what we do that feels not relevant, but it certainly does stretch our capacity.

In instances such as this, where the artist reframed a project in order to meet funding conditions, artmaking happened not strictly because a Nashville arts organization provided a grant, but rather because this artist was able to simultaneously draw upon skills in two domains of creativity, the arts and business, to reimagine her artistic vision into an entrepreneurial pursuit fitting available resources. As an arts entrepreneur, this artist, a small ensemble performer and private lessons instructor, recognized that her primary artistic pursuit was more intimately tied to the availability of grant funding than the pursuits of the mixed-media artist quoted above, which helped to motivate her decision.

Refining the Definition of the Entrepreneurial Artist

Artists in the contemporary economy are hindered more than helped by persistent, popular notions of the artist as flighty, fanciful, and perhaps most damaging, destined to struggle financially for the sake of producing their art. These stereotypes contribute to the precarity by which artists have long been defined by creating a substantial barrier in artist-client relations, forcing artists to constantly negotiate the value of their labor and work.

The situation is such that in the contemporary economy, a sustainable arts practice is indicative not just of artistic success, but of communicative and interpretative ability as well. Post receipt of entrepreneurial training, the majority of our interviewees felt more confident in their work, that their work was improving, that they were making better choices with regards to their art, and that they were more effective at targeting their work to an audience. These benefits indicate the presence of an underlying mechanism within artists, namely, the unlocked ability to evaluate art production—a key element of arts entrepreneurship. Artists describe using their creativity to drive their decisions and their business skills—considering art not just in terms of motivation, style, purpose, or intent but also in terms of time and cost—to elevate, rather than diminish, their creative practice.

From our findings, we have derived a refinement of the term *entrepreneurial artist* by nuancing a new conceptualization of artist entrepreneurs developed to capture the mechanism and effects of interactions between creativity in art and creativity in business, specifically. Our findings support the assertion that artists purposefully seek to develop practice models that fulfill their personal aspirations for success while accommodating their desires to protect their creativity and artistic products via maintaining control of the creative process. We have found that artists recombine their disparate creative abilities to navigate the challenges of their labor market (Chang & Wyszomirski, 2015; Scherdin & Zander, 2011; White, 2015). They produce their desired end, creative control, by converting their available means, a high propensity for creativity in multiple domains, through the mediating structure of their artistic practice (Essig, 2015).

We therefore assert that definitions of the entrepreneurial artist may be refined to include those who consider their artmaking to be their own micro or small business. We specifically claim that entrepreneurial artists should be defined as artists who are “doing the work”; striving for financial stability by conducting cost-benefit analysis to assign accurate value to their art and labor and help determine which projects to pursue, diversifying their artistic skillsets and creative products, and capitalizing on their available resources to develop cohesive collections.

Notably, the refined definition of entrepreneurial artists derived from this study of professional artists is not significantly different from definitions of entrepreneurship that could be applied to entrepreneurial members of other economic sectors not related to the arts. It serves to capture the breadth of artists’ experiences and abilities while validating their substantial efforts at restructuring the processes of their work (Center for Cultural Innovation, 2016).

Limitations

Our sampling process excludes, by design, artists who had not expressed a formal interest in

ARTIVATE 10.1

learning about entrepreneurial approaches to creating artistic outputs via the Arts & Business Council of Greater Nashville's Periscope program at the time of study. As our respondents' participation in the Periscope program has the potential to induce selection bias, future research would benefit from an expansion of the sampling frame to encompass artists who have not yet received or who have no interest in receiving formal entrepreneurial training, as well as artists training and working in other contexts. Further, while our results are likely generalizable to artists seeking to engage in individual creative pursuits, the findings may be less applicable to artists who are not engaged in independent profit-seeking within arts markets. Still, while we may speculate that a broader sampling frame could lend a sense of balance or further nuance to our findings regarding the expectations and experiences of artists engaged in community-based work, that entrepreneurial artists with formal training in business continue to perceive of themselves as being cornered into undesirable scenarios in regards to their ability to exercise agency alongside their creativity is a significant finding with implications for grant- and policy-making approaches. Our findings indicate that entrepreneurial artists engaged in community-based work possess tools that help them to operate independently and profitably in their field. Future research is well positioned to explore in greater depth how the presence or absence of entrepreneurial training in an artist's skillset impacts their approach to or perceptions of opportunities for community-based work.

Though Nashville offers the opportunity to study artists' creative practices both in the context of steady and rapid growth, an additional limitation of this study is the inability of the midsize study environment to replicate the arts scenes of much larger cities such as Los Angeles or New York. Despite these limitations, Nashville is a suitable environment to derive insight on entrepreneurial artists given the competitive nature of its arts market. Where artists in Nashville benefit from the ability to test new work in the context of a critically developing arts scene, they suffer from the same issues of affordability and lack of space identified by artists in other cities.

Discussion

Entrepreneurial artists engage in business and entrepreneurial practices as a means of controlling their creative process and output. They use their skills and capacity for creativity to combat one of the most prevalent, damaging narratives facing artists in the market: the idea that their work does not have to be priced well enough to financially support them, because of the nature of their motivation for pursuing it. Entrepreneurial artists have a mentality of "my art is my business," and take several approaches towards achieving success, including: diversifying and taking advantage of the full range of their artistic skillsets, identifying and targeting audiences and later seeking opportunities to show directly to that audience, being open to opportunities that could enhance their practice or network, such as collaborations, and taking the initiative to create their own opportunities to help ensure practice longevity.

Compared to the general population, artists self-rate as possessing above average levels of creativity in the domains of math, science, and engineering, business and entrepreneurship, the

social, civic and community pursuits, and everyday creativity, far beyond their traditional artistic pursuits.² Our respondents' approaches to the business of art suggests that artists who have undergone entrepreneurial training are capable of exercising creativity in domains beyond their artistic practice. As such, we argue that creativity in art, business, and the social are neither perpendicular nor parallel to arts entrepreneurship, but instead comprise a helix structure of creative domains inhabited by the entrepreneurial artist. The resultant capacity of entrepreneurial artists to be involved with the construction of community—through intentional planning or just by the nature of their work—is limited only by the degree to which artists are supported in their pursuits. As a creative domain, arts entrepreneurship is a practice of self-preservation just as much as it is a process of self-management and self-actualization (Beckman & Essig, 2012). Artists in our sample rejected the idea that a defined role of artists is to be engaged with or involved in their community, with conversations about available funding opportunities yielding frustration about community development contingencies embedded into grants. Our findings indicate that entrepreneurial training empowered our respondents to initiate community-focused approaches to their work on their own terms, thus allowing them to maintain creative freedom and control over their artistic practice.

Artists, when inclined, can make powerful contributions to community development. But like those of other private citizens and businesses, the entrepreneurial pursuits of artists are driven by a diversity of motivations, and many of our respondents felt that being assigned a role of “placemaker” due to their artistic abilities limited their freedom to creatively pursue those motivations via their practice. While a quarter of our respondents reported engaging with community as a natural element of their practice, several others initiated loose attacks against funding structures that require artists to engage with community development, citing concerns about stretching their capacity, inequality of expectations between themselves and other entities also engaged in processes of community development, and burdening their creativity. Where a healthy portion of extant research looks at entrepreneurial training as a means of furthering artists' skills or abilities to contribute to community development, our findings suggest that where cities seek to embed artists into development practices via funding, artists, particularly entrepreneurial artists, can interpret the conditions of these funds as being asked to operate beyond the scope of their practice. Our findings indicate that for many Periscope participants, their entrepreneurial training has been conceptualized and implemented as a means of artist development and career making, directly, rather than it being fashioned into a backdoor for the development of community-based art.

That entrepreneurial artists see opportunity in community beyond the scope of formalized placemaking activity is an indication of their ability to creatively and agentially redefine the social scope and impact of their practice. As is, formalized community development projects risk failing to provide adequate space for artists to flex their capacity for arts entrepreneurship within formal organizational structures (Frenette, 2017). It is possible that, when embedded into

²This study, available upon request.

the organizational structures of community development initiatives, beliefs and stereotypes regarding artists' abilities to engage in formalized work negatively impact the degree to which they are treated as experts, to the detriment of projects and communities that would benefit from their unique entrepreneurial perspective (Frenette, 2017).

The failure of communities, and specifically, funders, to recognize the primary entrepreneurial motivation of artists—a desire to maintain control of their creative process—while ignoring the considerable social good artists undertake in their practices, undermines the effort, training, skill, and labor involved in the production of art. Investing in artists via entrepreneurial training has the potential to yield artist-led community benefits and projects similar in class to creative placemaking initiatives, while simultaneously honoring the desire of entrepreneurial artists to maintain control of their input and product. The entrepreneurial artists in our sample demonstrated an ability to see and act upon opportunities in community on their own terms. Many went so far as to create and amplify opportunities for themselves and other artists, using their artistic, entrepreneurial, and social creativity to guide the stewardship of their practices in preservation of the motivation for pursuing it. In recognition of this, we assert that conversations about the role and character of artists in communities should be reframed to consider their proclivity for creativity not just in the artistic domain, but in the realms of business, entrepreneurship, and the social as well.

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