

Motivations and Intentionality in the Arts Portfolio Career

An Investigation into How Visual and Performing Artists Construct Portfolio Careers

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ABSTRACT: Many artists find themselves in the role of an entrepreneur and small business owner as they manage multiple overlapping jobs while engaging in a portfolio career. This research investigates how visual and performing artists construct meaningful portfolio careers and if the portfolio career model minimizes risk. The findings reveal that the majority of respondents view a portfolio career as less secure than a full-time job, but also prefer the portfolio career. A significant amount of their time is spent on creative activity and teaching. Artistic fulfillment, pay, and time commitment are the primary factors artists consider when selecting work.
KEYWORDS: portfolio career, arts entrepreneurship, arts careers, career patterns.
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Introduction

Many visual and performing artists working in the United States engage in portfolio careers and do not hold one single job with one employer (Bartleet, et al., 2019; Bridgstock & Cunningham, 2016; Coulson, 2012; Munnelly, 2020a; Thomson, 2013). There are numerous definitions of a portfolio career provided in prior research. These definitions revolve around holding numerous concurrent jobs, the lack of a single employer, and being self-employed and self-managed (Bartleet et al., 2019; Bartleet, Bennett, Bridgstock, Draper, Harrison & Schippers, 2012; Bennett & Bridgstock, 2015; Bridgstock & Cunningham, 2016; Menger, 1999; Myers, 2007). In this research, I define a portfolio career as holding multiple overlapping jobs in the arts as opposed to

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having a single full-time job with one employer. It often includes self-employed work, but it might also include a full-time position in addition to freelance work. While an arts portfolio career is made up of arts-focused work, it may include some work outside of the arts including a full-time day job. The term *artists* is used in this research to represent both visual and performing artists who create and perform.

Previous studies have found that artists are more likely to freelance and hold multiple jobs than individuals in any other profession (Menger, 1999; Popović & Ratković, 2013; Woronkowicz & Noonan, 2019). Project-based work is common in the arts as many artistic projects only require the artist's time and skill for a limited period (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2015; Menger, 1999; Woronkowicz, & Noonan, 2019). Freelance artists who hold multiple jobs engage in portfolio careers and are often self-employed. Menger (1999 & 2006) and Throsby (2010) suggest that freelance artists could be thought of as operators of small businesses. While not all small business owners would consider themselves entrepreneurs, artists who engage in portfolio careers need to have entrepreneurial skills in order to be successful and competitive (Bartleet et al., 2019; Coulson, 2012; Everts et al., 2021). Menger (2006) suggests that the careers of self-employed artists display attributes of entrepreneurship including the creation of value and risk taking. Artists must also be proactive in finding work and engage in opportunity recognition strategies associated with entrepreneurship (Coulson, 2012). Previous research has found that self-employed artists do not always consider themselves entrepreneurs, but they may be accidental or forced entrepreneurs (Coulson, 2012; Everts et. al, 2021). The arts portfolio career is a type of entrepreneurial small business model.

While previous research does indicate that many artists engage in a portfolio career (Bartleet et al., 2019; Bridgstock & Cunningham, 2016; Coulson, 2012; Menger, 1999; Munnely, 2020a; Thomson, 2013), there is lack of detailed data regarding the jobs that make up the portfolio career and how artists go about constructing their portfolio career (Bartleet et al., 2019; Coulson, 2012). Existing research suggests the decision to pursue a portfolio career is often based on supply and demand more so than the desire to pursue a portfolio career, but there seems to be a lack of data from artists supporting this question (Bartleet et al., 2019; Coulson, 2012; Coulson, 2010; Fenwick, 2006). Because there appears to be a lack of detailed data regarding how artists construct their portfolio careers and whether they engage in a portfolio career by choice or out of necessity, a central goal of this research is to collect data from artists to answer these questions. This research investigates the process by which visual and performing artists construct a meaningful portfolio career and whether they engage in a portfolio career out of choice or necessity. The research questions include:

- What types of jobs make up the artist portfolio career?
- What factors do artists take into consideration when deciding what work to accept or decline?
- Do artists consider a portfolio career with multiple employers to be more secure than one full-time job with one single employer?
- Do artists engage in portfolio careers out of necessity or by choice?

Given that we know many artists will engage in a portfolio career, it is important to gain a better understanding of how artists make career decisions—including the decision to enter into a portfolio career and the decision around what work to include in the portfolio career. This research will provide insights into how artists build and maintain their portfolio career. It is the hope that this research will provide information that can assist in preparing future generations of artists to think critically about how they build their careers.

Background & Literature Review

Organizational Behavioral Origins

While there is a lack of research regarding how artists construct a meaningful portfolio career, organizational behavioral research provides a starting point for the theories and motivations behind building a successful portfolio career. The research of Handy (1989) and Cawsey et al. (1995) was used to provide a conceptual framework for this project. Although the portfolio career has existed in practice for centuries (Clague, 2011), organizational behavioral researcher Charles Handy is credited with formalizing the concept. In his 1989 book, *The Age of Unreason*, Charles Handy predicted that by the beginning of the twenty-first century “less than half the industrial world will be in ‘proper’ full-time jobs in organizations” (p.31). He believed that full-time positions with one organization or company would no longer be the norm and that instead individuals would be self-employed with a variety of jobs and projects. Handy attributed this change to the growth of shamrock organizations, which are organizations “based around a core of essential executives and workers supported by outside contractors and part-time help” (p. 32).

Freelance contractors often have more than one job or project, and these may be with different employers. Handy (1989) refers to the various types of work individuals take on and how this work fits together as a portfolio. He describes five categories of work that make up the portfolio: (1) wage work, (2) fee work, (3) homework, (4) gift work, and (5) study work. Wage and fee work are both types of paid work, while homework, gift work, and study work are unpaid. There is an important distinction between wage and fee work. Wage or salary work refers to money that is paid for time given, while fee work is money paid in exchange for delivered results. According to Handy, fee work is increasing as more jobs go to freelance contractors instead of to full-time employees. While Handy defines homework as “the whole catalogue of tasks that go on in the home” (p. 184), many individuals may not consider this a part of their portfolio career as homework needs to be done whether one engages in a portfolio career or not. Gift work is work that is done for free. It is often done for charity or community groups. Study work is the work needed to keep up one’s skills or acquire additional skills. Study work can lead to additional paid work opportunities.

In the past, the typical work portfolio consisted of one job (Handy, 1989), and this is still the common work portfolio for many individuals. That job equaled a career. The portfolio career model consists of multiple jobs that make up a career “because much creative work is

conducted on a by-project basis, with each project drawing upon the creative skills of different combinations of different people” (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2015, p. 264). A portfolio consisting of only one job is riskier than a portfolio with multiple jobs. As Handy (1989) points out, few people would put all of their money into one investment, but that is what many have been doing with their working lives. In their 1995 article, *The Portfolio Career as a Response to a Changing Job Market*, Cawsey et al. compare the portfolio career to a financial portfolio, both existing to minimize risks. “The financial portfolio handles risk by holding various stocks with differing risks for differing parts of the economic cycle. The career portfolio minimizes risks by accumulating skill sets that can produce a variety of value-adding activities. If one skill is not in demand, another might be” (Cawsey et al., 1995, p. 43). A portfolio career allows artists to balance higher and lower risk options in much the same way as an investment portfolio (Bartleet et al., 2012). Portfolio careers eliminate the dependence upon one employer, which results in higher job security because individuals have several employers and streams of income (Cawsey et al., 1995). If one job ends or is terminated, the individual will still have several sources of income in their portfolio. The more jobs there are in the portfolio, the less risk an individual has. The more versatility of skills one has and their willingness to continue to develop more skills also reduces the risk of becoming obsolete (Cawsey et al., 1995). Cawsey et al. discuss three categories of skills: (1) a developing skill, (2) a mature skill, and (3) a post-maturity skill; “A developing skill is a skill or skill set that the individual has decided is worth pursuing and developing” (p. 43). While the skill is in the development stage, an individual will generally charge less or base the fee on results delivered instead of on time spent working. Continuously developing new skills is important as it will diversify the individual’s skillset and allow them to keep up with new demands. Once a skill is fully developed, it is known as a mature skill and can be offered at a higher fee or wage. When a skill is no longer in demand—or when it is replaced by more complex and in-demand skills the individual has developed—it is referred to as a post-maturity skill. Because the demand for skills fluctuates with the market, continuously developing new skills to replace skills that are no longer in demand is essential. By developing new skills throughout their career, an individual can work to ensure that they have a diverse and relevant skill set. Versatility and relevance of skills reduces the risk of becoming obsolete.

In addition to having various skills in a portfolio, Cawsey et al. (1995) recommend that an individual consider three types of clients for their portfolio: (1) money clients, (2) learning clients, and (3) niche clients; “Money clients provide the money to pay the bills. The skills used for these clients are generally not particularly unique or valuable. Individuals have these clients out of necessity, not by choice” (p. 44). Learning clients are opportunities that allow an individual to develop new skills and are often paid at a lower rate since the individual is still learning the skills and is not an expert. An individual may take on learning clients in order to develop additional skills to expand their portfolio of offerings. “Niche clients result from the matching of developed skills with a significant need. Here, the individual can market or sell his/her skills for an appropriate price. Niche clients allow one to develop a reputation for skills proficiency and to network for future work” (p. 44). Individuals might also consider the amount of learning that occurs on a job in relation to the amount the job pays. Cawsey et al. recommend that ideally

individuals should look for opportunities that provide either low pay and high learning or high pay and low learning. This is because jobs that offer low pay and low learning do not have a significant return value, while jobs that offer high pay and high learning could be risky if the individual isn't skilled enough to meet the client's expectations.

Individuals often look to a job for the fulfillment of a variety of needs including professional satisfaction, financial security, growth, and socialization (Handy, 1989). It can be challenging for one job to fulfill such a variety of needs. Through a portfolio career an individual can look to a variety of jobs or projects to fulfill these different needs. Niche clients might fulfill the need for interesting and satisfying work, while money clients provide financial security, and learning clients offer the opportunity to continuously develop new skills. Artists might look to creative freelance work to meet their artistic needs while also engaging in teaching and administrative work to provide financial stability (Bartleet et al., 2012). Different clients also provide a variety of people to work with, which could increase interest levels. Handy (1989) suggests that individuals have expected their one job career to fulfill too many needs, which often leads to disappointment. While the notion of not having one stable job may be frightening, Handy suggests that it might increase job satisfaction. A portfolio career can allow artists to be in control of their careers, deciding when they work, what artistic work they take on, the environment they choose to work in, and the fees they choose to charge, which may increase job satisfaction (Cutler, 2010).

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Arts Portfolio Career

Although the portfolio career is often positioned as a way to take control of one's career while pursuing artistic interests and minimizing financial risk through multiple employers, it has also been criticized for insecurity and exposing individuals to exploitative tendencies (Coulson, 2012; Fenwick 2006; Scolere, 2019). Advantages of the portfolio career include "freedom to choose one's own work and hours, and a non-routine working life." (Coulson, 2010, p. 256). One of the biggest advantages often touted about the portfolio career is the autonomy over one's professional life. One study of non-arts workers engaged in portfolio careers found that "most participants enjoyed the creative freedom to make choices, to design their own work process and environment" (Fenwick, 2006, p. 71). In the arts, the ability to pursue one's artistic vision is a commonly mentioned advantage of the portfolio career (Bartleet et al., 2012; Cutler, 2010). While a portfolio career can allow an individual to have autonomy over their career choices, including which projects to engage in and schedule, the autonomy can be accompanied by financial insecurity and unpredictable income (Coulson, 2010). Fenwick (2006) found that most participants enjoyed the freedom of choice that came with a portfolio career, but they also found the labor of designing a portfolio career exhausting at times. It is also important to note that due to the precarious nature of the portfolio career, few artists will find themselves with the financial security to have complete control over their schedule and ability to pursue only the jobs that align with their artistic vision and ideal (Bartleet et al., 2019).

In the United States, health insurance is often attached to a full-time job. While individuals

engaging in portfolio careers may have health insurance through other means such as a spouse, they generally do not receive health insurance through their project work. A study by the Future of Music Coalition (Thomson & Cook, 2013) found that artists are less likely to have health insurance than the general population. This is not surprising given that many artists are self-employed and would not have access to an employer provided health insurance plan. The study found that 43% of the artists surveyed did not have health insurance at the time of the study. “This is more than double the 18% of the non-elderly population that is uninsured, as estimated by the Kaiser Family Foundation” (Thomson & Cook, 2013, p. 7). Of those who indicated they did have health insurance, 39% had purchased a private or individual insurance plan. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, this is six times greater than the percentage of the general population that purchases individual plans (Thomson & Cook, 2013). The lack of access to affordable health insurance is another reason that the portfolio career can be a precarious career choice. Full-time jobs also offer unemployment benefits, which self-employed artists are generally not eligible for (Menger, 2006). Lack of access to health insurance and unemployment benefits likely influences the number of artists who decide to hold full-time positions both inside and outside of the arts—in addition to their project-based work. Holding a full-time job, even if it does not align with one’s artistic priorities, is one way artists can obtain health insurance and be eligible to receive unemployment benefits.

Mental health is another concern for artists engaging in portfolio careers. While factors of a portfolio career can provide satisfaction, they can also provide anxiety (Fenwick, 2006). “Low incomes, irregular work patterns, romanticizing the ‘tortured artist’ and the dismissal of music as being a worthwhile career pursuit, have all been contributing factors to the mental and physical health and wellbeing of musicians” (Bartleet et al., 2019, p. 284). Perceptions of success also have an impact on the mental health of artists. Research suggests that the career realities for artists can be vastly different to what they perceived when deciding to pursue studies and a career in the arts. This can lead to narrow perceptions of success and an identity crisis when careers don’t match preconceived expectations (Hennekam & Bennett, 2016; López-Íñiguez & Bennett, 2020). Artists often identify deeply with their art and career transitions can have a significant effect on their self-identity and mental health (Bridgstock & Cunningham, 2016; Hennekam & Bennett, 2016).

The previously mentioned research of Handy (1989) and Cawsey et. al (1995) positions the portfolio career as a way to minimize financial risk. Several studies on arts portfolio careers (Bridgstock & Cunningham, 2016; Bartleet et al., 2012; Menger, 1999) have also suggested that a diversified portfolio of work could be considered a risk management strategy. The reason being that multiple employers means multiple streams of income, so if one job in the portfolio ends or is terminated, there will be other streams of income remaining. However, this reasoning fails to consider that not all jobs in a portfolio career are equal. Certain jobs may pay the bills, while others deliver artistic fulfillment, networking opportunities, or the chance to learn a new skill. Many artists experience low pay even with a portfolio career (Everts et al., 2021; Hennekam & Bennett, 2016; Menger, 1999; Menger 2006; Throsby, 2010). Coulson (2012) found that musicians in their study experience low pay and insecurity and were often just getting by

financially. Bridgstock and Cunningham (2016) found “that traditional arts occupations are the least remunerated and the most likely to be self-employed and precarious” (p. 11). Several other studies indicate that artists often face higher underemployment and unemployment rates than the general working population (Menger, 2006; Menger, 1999; Popović & Ratković, 2013).

While the narrative of the portfolio career being a type of risk management tool is prevalent, it fails to point out that artists participating in the portfolio careers are the ones who bear all the risk. “Under the portfolio career model, workers have individual responsibility for their career development, and thus assume all risk associated with economic vicissitudes, changes to supply chains and market demand, and personal adversity” (Bridgstock & Cunningham, 2016, p. 12). For those in full-time positions, some of this risk is taken on by the employer. The COVID-19 pandemic offers an example of this as some arts organizations continued to pay their full-time artists, while others engaged in furloughs and layoffs. The Metropolitan Opera Orchestra musicians went unpaid for nearly a year (Jacobs, 2021), while the New York Philharmonic musicians agreed to pay cuts so that they could continue to receive a salary while the orchestra was dark (Dubb, 2020). Both the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic are full-time unionized orchestras governed by collective bargaining agreements. The pandemic showed that artists who were employed full-time by organizations and artists who were self-employed both faced insecurities and risks. While artists who were self-employed might have been eligible to apply for relief grants, they did not have the luxury of either their employer deciding that continuing to provide a salary and benefits was a budget priority or that they were legally required due to an existing contract. In many instances, such as with the New York Philharmonic, union contracts offered protection to artists who were employed full-time.

The possibility of engaging in self-exploitation was a concern of portfolio careers mentioned by several researchers (Bridgstock & Cunningham, 2016; Coulson, 2012; Morgan et al., 2013). Scolere (2019) suggests that the narrative of the advantages of the portfolio career rationalizes a precarious and financially insecure career. “The narrative of *passion or love for the work* and ‘creative lifestyle’ becomes a way of rationalizing the low pay and insecure working conditions” (Scolere, 2019, p. 1893). Artists may be willing to accept low pay and job insecurity in order to continue working in the arts. Bridgstock and Cunningham (2016) found that instead of leaving the arts in search of better paid opportunities in other fields, artists continue to accept underemployment and low pay while self-exploiting. While the risk of exploitation is a concern, one could also make the argument that artists might be choosing to consider the non-monetary payment that creative work provides such as artistic fulfillment, autonomy, and low level of routine in addition to solely considering financial compensation (Menger, 1999). Some artists may be willing to take on riskier working patterns because of the personal satisfaction derived by the work.

Little research has been done exploring whether artists engage in a portfolio career by choice or out of necessity due to a lack of full-time jobs. Existing research suggests the decision to pursue a portfolio career is often based on supply and demand more so than the desire to pursue a portfolio career, but there seems to be a lack of data from artists concerning this question (Bartleet et al., 2019; Coulson, 2012; Coulson, 2010; Fenwick, 2006). While Menger (2006)

does note an oversupply of artists, they also suggest that rather than being solely due to supply and demand, the growing trend of portfolio careers might be due to “the pervasive uncertainty of artistic careers, and the ways for individuals and organizations to handle uncertain prospects and to manage individual and business risks” (p. 769). Regardless of the reasoning, it is evident that the portfolio career is a common career model for artists.

Data Collection

This study utilized a mixed-methods design. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected during the spring and summer of 2021 using an online survey built in Qualtrics. This method of data collection was selected in order to reach a large number of individuals in the target population who were spread across a large geographic area. A mix of closed-ended and open-ended questions were used. While the survey instrument did collect both quantitative and qualitative data, this article focuses on the quantitative data collected from the survey.

The target study population was individuals who self-identify as having a portfolio career as a visual or performing artist. Participants were recruited through state and local arts agencies as well as artist services organizations. The reasoning for going through state and local arts agencies and artist services organizations was to assist in ensuring the survey reached individuals who derive a significant portion of their income through arts-related work and spend a significant portion of their work time on arts-related work. Utilizing arts agencies and artist services organizations was away to target professional working visual and performing artists. The survey did ask if the participants identified as a visual or performing artist with a portfolio career. If they selected “no,” the survey was programmed to end. Participants were also asked whether they were at least eighteen years of age. These were the only screening questions.

Because the COVID-19 Pandemic has had a significant effect on artists and arts organizations, and has likely affected the way artists engage in portfolio careers, respondents were asked to respond according to their 2019, pre-pandemic work experiences aside from the final four questions, which focused on expectations for their post-pandemic careers. The purpose of asking participants to consider their pre-pandemic work life was to determine a baseline of norms for the pre-pandemic arts portfolio career so that future research can investigate the pandemic’s effects on artists careers.

Findings

The survey was completed by 122 individuals who identified as having arts portfolio careers. Participants came from a variety of arts background with just over half identifying as visual artists (see figure 1). Those selecting “other” identified photography, woodworking, writing, videography, installation, and multidisciplinary as their primary disciplines.

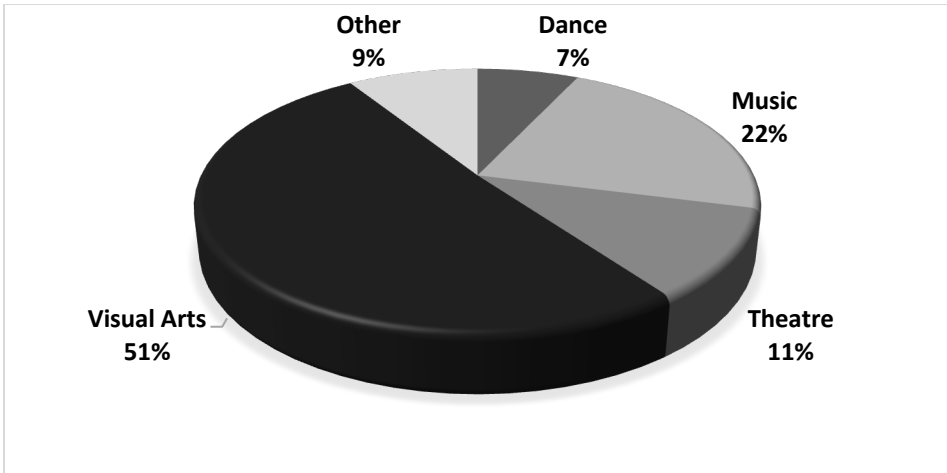


Figure 1: Primary Arts Discipline

One goal of the research was to understand the types of jobs that make up a portfolio career including the balance of arts and non-arts jobs. The survey next inquired into whether the portfolio careers contained non-arts related work. 62% indicated that their portfolio career only contained arts-related work while 38% indicated that their portfolio careers contained a mix of both arts-related and non-arts related work. Another important piece of understanding the types of jobs that make up a portfolio career is the balance of full-time and project-based work. While a portfolio career is generally thought of in terms of multiple project-based jobs, some artists do also engage in a full-time job to support their artistic endeavors and for the benefits, including health insurance, retirement plans, and unemployment, that full-time positions often provide. In this study, the majority of participants, 68%, did not hold a full-time job. Of the 32% who indicated that they did hold a full-time job, 79% stated that their full-time job was related to the arts.

Because the portfolio career may contain both arts-related and non-arts related work, it was important to investigate how much work time the participating artists spent on arts-related work. The majority of participants, 88%, spent over half of their worktime on arts-related work. 61% indicated that over 75% of their work time was arts related, including 38% whose work time was 100% arts related. The majority, 68%, also earned over half of their income from arts-related work (see figure 2).

Participants were next asked what types of work made up their portfolio careers and were directed to select as many categories as applied. Creative activity including performing, exhibiting, and creating were the most common type of work found in the participants' portfolio careers with 82% selecting that option; this was followed by teaching with 68% selecting that option (see figure 3). All but 17% of participants selected more than one category of work indicating that many artists do a variety of jobs as part of their portfolio career. Half of respondents engaged in three or more categories of work.

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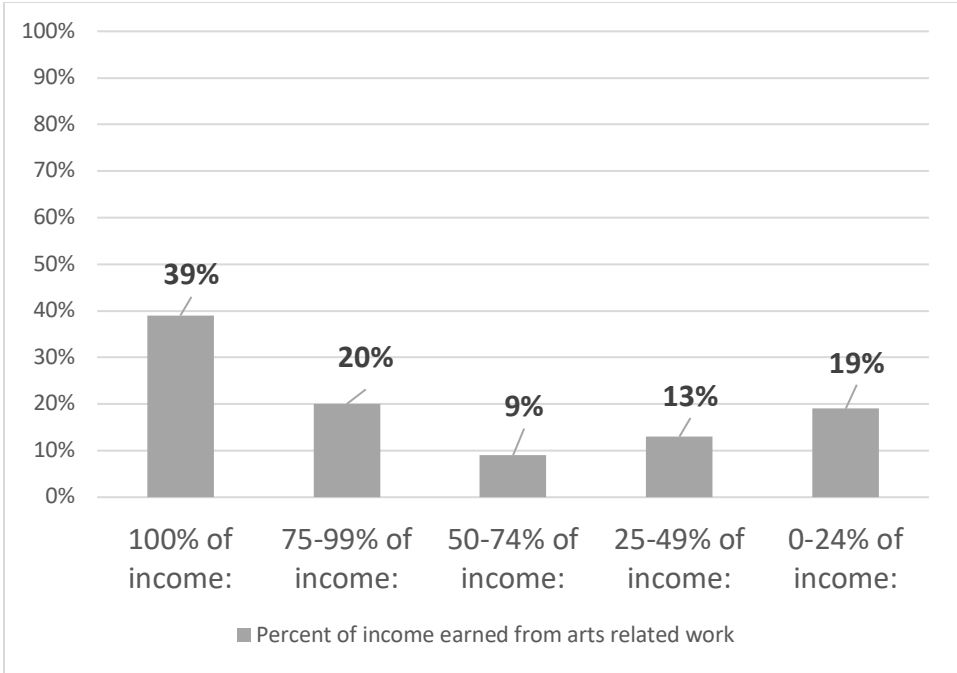


Figure 2: Percent of Income Earned from Arts-Related Work

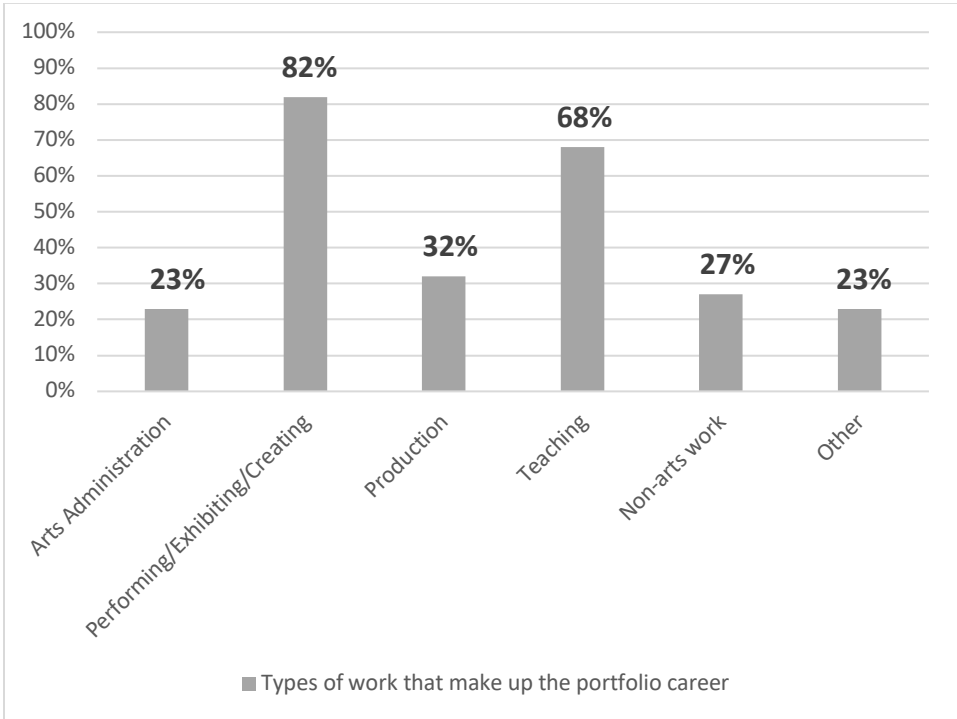


Figure 3: Types of Work That Make Up the Portfolio Career

Participants were then asked to select the single category of work that makes up the largest portion of their portfolio career. Performing/exhibiting/creating and teaching were again the two most common responses with 44% and 28% of respondents selecting these options.

Another goal of the study was to gain a greater understanding of what factors artists take into consideration when deciding what work to accept or decline. Participants were asked to select all of the factors they consider from a list of six choices with the option of selecting “other” and entering a factor not on the list (see figure 4). Artistic fulfillment, time commitment/schedule, and payment were the three most common responses. When asked to identify one single factor as the most important consideration, artistic fulfillment was the most common choice with 42% selecting it. Time commitment/schedule and payment were the second most common choices with 25% selecting each option. Networking, learning new skills, and colleagues were each selected by less than 5% of participants.

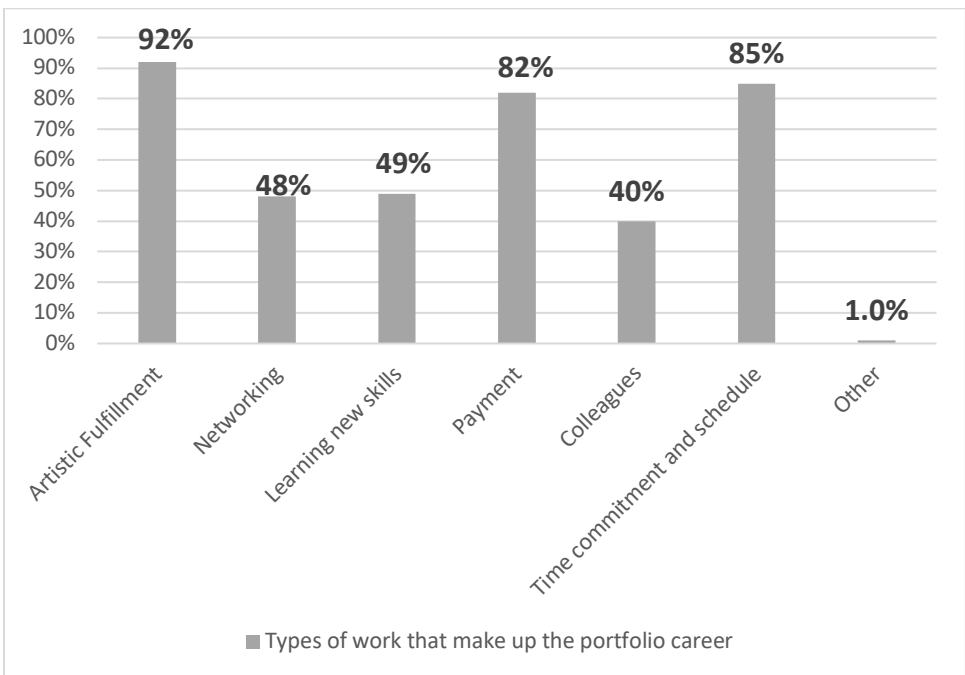


Figure 4: Factors Considered When Deciding What Arts Specific Work to Accept or Decline

It is unclear whether visual and performing artists in this study felt that they have control over the type of work they engage in or if they felt they were in a position where they must take whatever work comes their way. When asked if they think intentionally about the type of work that makes up their portfolio careers, the majority, 70%, indicated that they always do, while 28% indicated that they sometimes do. It does appear that the majority of artists in this study felt they have some control over the type of work they engage in and think intentionally about it.

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While prior research (Bartleet et al., 2019; Bridgstock & Cunningham, 2016; Coulson, 2012; Thomson, 2013) does demonstrate that many visual and performing artists engage in portfolio careers as opposed to having a single job with one employer, there is little research that asks artists if they engage in a portfolio career by choice or out of necessity. When asked about this, responses were mixed. 33% indicated it was by choice, while 24% indicated it was out of necessity. However, 39% stated that their portfolio career was both by choice and out of necessity. In a related question, when asked if they would prefer to have one full-time job in their arts discipline or a portfolio career in their arts discipline, the majority, 60%, indicated that they would prefer to have a portfolio career. Only 22% selected that they would prefer one full-time job.

Organizational behavior research indicates that one benefit of a portfolio career is that it minimizes financial risk (Handy, 1989; Cawsey et al., 1995). The reason being that if an individual were to lose one job in their portfolio career, they would still have other streams of income. If an individual only had one job, they would lose all of their income in this scenario. While the literature does discuss the risk mitigation of portfolio careers, there does not appear to be data supporting this claim from individuals who engage in portfolio careers. When asked if having multiple employers minimizes financial risk, a similar percentage of participants responded “yes” compared to those who selected “no.” Those indicating that having multiple employers does minimize financial risk was 37%, while 39% believed it does not. The remainder were unsure. Interestingly, while responses were mixed for this particular question, when asked if they consider a portfolio career with multiple employers more secure than having a full-time job with one single employer, nearly half of respondents, 49%, chose “less secure.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant effect on both artists and arts organizations, so it was important to ask several questions that focused on expectations for post-pandemic work life. One might assume that the pandemic has left many self-employed artists reconsidering their portfolio careers, but that was not the case in this study. When asked if they were reconsidering their arts portfolio career due to the pandemic, only 26% responded with “yes”. It could also be assumed that the pandemic might influence the factors that were most important to individuals when deciding what arts-specific work to accept or decline, but artistic fulfillment, payment, and time commitment/schedule remained the top three most important factors. There were no significant differences in the factors considered when deciding what work to take on or decline when looking at post-pandemic work expectations.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to investigate the process of how visual and performing artists construct a meaningful portfolio career and whether they engage in a portfolio career by choice or out of necessity. The research considered four questions:

- What types of jobs make up the artist portfolio career?
- What factors do artists take into consideration when deciding what work to accept or decline?

- Do artists consider a portfolio career with multiple employers to be more secure than one full-time job with one single employer?
- Do artists engage in portfolio careers out of necessity or by choice?

What types of jobs make up the artist portfolio career?

Participants in this study had both arts-related and non-arts related work in their portfolio career with the majority solely engaging in arts-related work. Artists engaging in portfolio careers will often have a combination of both arts and non-arts work, so this was an expected mix (Bridgstock & Cunningham, 2016; Menger 1999, Menger, 2006; Throsby, 2007; Woronkowitz & Noonan, 2019). About 1/3 of respondents did hold full-time jobs, but the majority participated only in project-based work. Of those holding full-time positions, most held full-time positions in an arts-related area. A full-time position can be a way to support one's arts practice and a way to secure employer provided benefits that self-employed artists often lack such as health insurance and retirement plans. Creative activity and teaching were the two most common categories of work that participants engaged in. Over two-thirds of respondents held teaching positions as part of their portfolio career. The large number of artists engaging in teaching work is not surprising given that previous research demonstrates that teaching is one of the most common income streams for artists (Bennett, 2007; Munnely, 2020b; Strategic National Arts Alumni Project, 2017). Throsby (2007) discusses three unique labor markets that artists participate in:

a market for “pure” creative work involving an artist's core creative practice, such as producing original works of literature, painting, music, etc. or performing as actor, dancer, musician, etc.; a market for “arts-related” work that lies beyond an individual's immediate creative practice but uses his or her artistic knowledge and skills in activities such as teaching art, arts administration, etc.; and a non-arts market when an artist by choice or necessity generates income from an unrelated occupation in order to support his or her creative practice. (p. 395)

The respondents in this study did participate in all three labor markets. The types of work in the portfolio career were spread over several categories including arts administration, creative activity, production, teaching, and non-arts work. Creative work was the most common category that participants engaged in with all but 18% indicating that they have creative work such as performing, exhibitions, and commissions in their portfolio. This aligns with Throsby's definition of “pure creative work.” Over 80% of the respondents indicated that they engage in at least one category of what Throsby calls “arts-related work,” including arts administration, production, and teaching. As previously mentioned, a little over 1/3 of survey respondents engaged in work in the non-arts market, which Throsby names as the third labor market that artists participate in. Artists must decide how to split their time among the three labor markets, or categories, and many will engage in work in multiple categories (Throsby, 2007). In this study, the vast majority of participants engaged in more than one category of work. More than half indicated that they worked in three or more categories. This aligns with previous research

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indicating that the majority of musicians' income is generated from more than one category (Thomson, 2013).

What factors do artists take into consideration when deciding what work to accept or decline?

Because little research has been done into the decision-making process artists engage in, it was important to inquire into what factors influence whether an artist accepts or declines a project. Artistic fulfillment was selected by almost all of the participants as influencing their decision-making. The ability to engage in work that aligns with one's artistic values is often named as a perk of an arts portfolio career (Bartleet et al., 2012; Cutler, 2010). Payment and time commitment/schedule were also selected by the majority of respondents. When asked to name the single most important factor, artistic fulfillment was the most common choice. The ability to decide what type of artistic work to engage in and a flexible schedule are two commonly mentioned advantages of the portfolio career. This type of autonomy and ownership of career decisions might lead to greater job satisfaction.

Research suggests that artists engage in portfolio careers out of necessity not choice (Bartleet et al., 2019; Coulson, 2012; Coulson, 2010; Fenwick, 2006), so one might assume that artists are not in a position to think intentionally about the type of work they engage in and how they build their portfolio careers. In this study, almost all of the participants indicated that that they do think intentionality about the type of work they include.

Do artists consider a portfolio career with multiple employers to be more secure than one full-time job with one single employer?

Organizational behavior literature (Handy, 1989; Cawsey et al., 1995) and arts portfolio career literature (Bridgstock & Cunningham, 2016; Bartleet et al., 2012; Menger, 1999) indicate that a portfolio career can be a way to manage risk much like a financial portfolio. The more jobs one has in their portfolio, the less they worry about losing one because they will still have other sources of income. While the literature indicates the portfolio career can be a way to manage risk, it also indicates that artists are often underpaid and go through periods of underemployment and unemployment (Everts et al., 2021; Menger, 2006; Menger, 1999; Popović & Ratković, 2013; Throsby, 2010). This may explain the mixed results when participants were asked if having multiple employers minimizes financial risk. Just over 1/3 believed having multiple employers did minimize financial risk, while almost the same number of respondents believed that it did not minimize financial risk. Although participants were split on whether having multiple employers minimized risk, they seemed to believe that a portfolio career was less secure than a full-time job. Only 18% indicated that they considered a portfolio to be a more secure option than a full-time job. Again, the reasoning for the minimization of risk in the literature assumes that all jobs in the portfolio career are equal in terms of pay, but we know that is not the case. The research of Handy (1989) and Cawsey et al. (1995) encourages individuals to take on

different types of work in the portfolio career. Handy mentions that some work will be paid, while other work will not, which will instead provide learning opportunities that can lead to future paid work. Cawsey et al. encourage money, learning, and niche clients. The money clients provide high pay, the learning clients generally low pay with opportunities for learning that may later lead to higher paid work, and the niche clients provide fulfillment and usually higher pay. If all work in the portfolio career paid equally, and if artists did not often find themselves just getting by financially (Coulson, 2012), participants may have felt the portfolio career was a strategy to minimize financial risk. In all likelihood, losing just one job in the portfolio career could affect an artist's ability to meet their financial obligations until they are able to replace that job with another one that provides similar compensation.

Do artists engage in portfolio careers out of necessity or by choice?

There are several articles that indicate artists engage in portfolio careers out of necessity as opposed to it being a choice, but there appears to be a lack of data from artists regarding this question (Bartleet et al., 2019; Coulson, 2012; Coulson, 2010; Fenwick, 2006). When asked whether they engage in a portfolio career out of necessity or by choice, "both" was the most common response. 1/3 indicated it was a choice and just under one quarter indicated it was a necessity. It could be that for many, the portfolio career began as a necessity and ended up being a preference due to the autonomy it provides. This could explain why over half of respondents indicated that they would prefer an arts portfolio career over one full-time position in the arts. Even though artists largely feel that a portfolio career is a less secure option than a full-time position, many do prefer the portfolio career. Menger suggests that artists are "committed to a labor of love" (1999, p. 554) and may be willing to exchange higher income for psychic rewards. These psychic or emotional rewards include artistic fulfillment, autonomy, low level of routine, etc. This also relates to Handy's (1989) point that for too long people have looked to their single job to fulfill a variety of needs. Artists may find that through a portfolio career they are able to meet a wider range of needs such as artistic vision, flexible schedule, interesting colleagues, and a non-routine work life. A study of undergraduate music students found that their most important indicators of a successful career were artistic fulfillment, an active career, affecting people with music, and financial stability (Munnely, 2020b). A portfolio career may give artists more flexibility in achieving these subjective measures of success.

This research did not consider the career stage of the respondents, which could have an effect on how they view and construct their portfolio career. Due to the sample size (n=122), comparisons among arts disciplines were not made. Arts education and training were also not considered. Future research might consider if there are any noticeable trends by career stage, arts discipline, and/or level of education. It could also be valuable to consider how and where artists acquired the skills needed to manage their portfolio careers.

Conclusion

In order to prepare the next generation of artists to enter the profession, it is essential to understand the working patterns of artists and provide up-and-coming artists with realistic depictions of what an arts career looks like. Many artists will find themselves in the role of an entrepreneur and small business owner as they manage multiple overlapping jobs while engaging in portfolio careers. This research aimed to fill gaps in the literature regarding how artists build and maintain their portfolio careers and whether they enter into portfolio careers by choice or out of necessity. Despite existing assumptions that artists engage in a portfolio career due to a supply and demand issue, this study found the issue to be more complex. A number of respondents indicated that they intentionally chose to engage in a portfolio career. For many, the decision was both a choice and a necessity. Artists in this study appear to view the portfolio career as riskier than a full-time job. Although many of the respondents associate risk with the portfolio career model, the majority expressed a preference for an arts portfolio career over a full-time job in the arts when given the choice. This may be because a portfolio career can allow artists to have greater control of their careers. The ability to decide when they work, what artistic work they take on, and the environment they work in may be worth taking on a greater risk for some artists. Many artists engage in several different categories of work including work outside of the arts. A significant amount of their time is spent on creative activity and teaching. Artists in this study consider a variety of factors when deciding what work to include in their portfolio careers including artistic fulfillment, payment, and time commitment. Although prior research has indicated that artists engaging in portfolio careers often experience low pay and go through periods of underemployment and unemployment (Everts et al., 2021; Hennekam & Bennett, 2016; Menger, 1999; Menger 2006; Popović & Ratković, 2013; Throsby, 2010), artists in this study still appear to value the benefits afforded by the portfolio career model.

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