

THE STRATEGIC STUDIO:

How to Access and Assess Strategic Decision-Making in Visual Art Practice



Practice-led PhD

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Abstract

There are many motives for making art, but economic drivers are often acknowledged as key attributes of artistic success. In particular, they figure in discussions about the strategic orientation of successful artist's careers. However, in the literature on which this thesis is based, commercial factors are seen as important but limited, in relation to the actual range of

values driving creative output. Hans Abbing (2002, p.59) notes, for instance, that other *value concepts* (such as social values) also have a strategic role alongside financial considerations. The practice-led inquiry asks what *key concerns* influence the day-to-day decision-making processes of artists and what information would be needed to be able to critically 'think through what being an artist means to you' (Butler, 1988, p. 7).

In order to obtain access to the motives and *value concepts* of a practitioner, the author of this thesis has invented a '*strategic studio framework*', a tool by which to access and assess day-to-day decision-making in practice, thereby gathering the information needed to make informed professional decisions. The thesis argues a continuous *flux* in the values a practitioner may assign to the *key concerns* in the Framework at different points in time- and stresses the importance of self-conceptions and personal aspirations in this process. The degree by which these insights would aid judgement of the relative success of the decision-making process, is also discussed. As a result, this thesis provides a better understanding of the way artists make decisions, and of what would be needed to improve or stimulate such practices on their own merits.

The thesis will be primarily of interest to artists and art school lecturers looking to find new ways of critical self-inquiry, reflection and discourse. Secondly, it could be of interest to theorists who deal with visual artists and to those involved in supporting organisations within the cultural sector.

Abbing, H. (2002) *Why are artists poor?: The exceptional economy of the arts*. Amsterdam: University Press.

Butler, D. (1988) *Making Ways: The visual artist's guide to surviving and thriving*. Sunderland: Artic Producers Publishing Co Ltd.