

## Academic Philistinism? The Challenges of Contemporary Artistic Research Inside Academia. Semi-structured Interviews with Visual Art Students in Brazil

Marcelo Schellini<sup>1</sup>, Sonia BenGhida<sup>2</sup>, Djamil Ben-Ghida<sup>3</sup>, Flora Romanelli-Assumpção<sup>4</sup>

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**Abstract.** The objectives of this research are twofold, firstly, to analyse how departments of art and art practitioners are integrated within academia, and to scrutinise this coexistence, by focusing on emerging issues due to the nature of Art as “specific knowledge” thus, an assessment of its eventual mismatch within the generic framework of a traditional academic context. Consequently, this article exposes both frictions and dilemmas witnessed, as well as elaborates on the specificities of the Art knowledge and associated visual creativity and thinking. The study used qualitative analysis to explore the topic of the integration of art departments within academic settings. In this article, ten Visual Art students from three Brazilian universities are interviewed between May and August of 2022 about their perspectives on their studies and whether they advocate artistic research. The results shed light on how artistic practice is viewed as research and demonstrate how the traditional research outcome affects art students in their art production, academic and artistic identities, perceptions and expectations.

**Keywords:** Visual art; Art Education; Visual thinking; Creative Studies; University teaching.

[es] ¿Filisteísmo académico? Los desafíos de la investigación artística contemporánea dentro de la academia. Entrevistas semiestructuradas con estudiantes de artes visuales en Brasil

**Resumen.** Los objetivos de esta investigación son dos, en primer lugar, analizar cómo se integran los departamentos de arte y los practicantes del arte dentro de la academia, y escudriñar esta coexistencia, centrándose en los problemas emergentes debido a la naturaleza del arte como “conocimiento específico”, por lo tanto, una evaluación de su eventual desajuste en el marco genérico de un contexto académico tradicional. En consecuencia, este artículo expone tanto las fricciones como los dilemas observados, así como elabora las especificidades del conocimiento del Arte y el pensamiento visual. El estudio

<sup>1</sup> Vellore Institute of Technology  
E-mail: [marceloschellini@marceloschellini.com](mailto:marceloschellini@marceloschellini.com)  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0350-5381>

<sup>2</sup> McGill University  
E-mail: [benghison@gmail.com](mailto:benghison@gmail.com)  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8302-3368>

<sup>3</sup> University of Naples Federico II  
E-mail: [xdezn@naver.com](mailto:xdezn@naver.com)  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9313-5892>

<sup>4</sup> Federal University of São Francisco Valley  
E-mail: [flora.assumpcao@univasf.edu.br](mailto:flora.assumpcao@univasf.edu.br)  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6858-209X>

utilizó un análisis cualitativo para explorar el tema de la integración de los departamentos de arte dentro de los entornos académicos. En este artículo, diez estudiantes de Artes Visuales de tres universidades brasileñas son entrevistados entre mayo y agosto de 2022 sobre sus perspectivas sobre sus estudios y la investigación artística. Los resultados arrojan luz sobre cómo se considera la práctica artística como investigación y demuestran cómo el resultado de la investigación tradicional afecta a los estudiantes de arte en su producción artística, sus identidades académicas y artísticas, percepciones y expectativas. **Palabras clave:** Arte Visual; Arte Educación; Pensamiento Visual; Estudios Creativos; Enseñanza en la Universidad

**Summary:** 1. Introduction. 2. Literature review. 3. Methodology of research. 3.1. Semi-structured in-depth interviews. 3.2. Data gathering. 4. Results and discussion: Students' expectations and reflections on Arts, education and learning. 4.1. Context. 4.2. Arts practice as a site of knowledge. 4.3. Traditional vs non-traditional research outcomes formats. 4.4. Connections between Art and teaching. 4.5. Perspectives on the Creative Art classes and pedagogy. 4.6. Perspectives on artistic development: developing the ingredients of innovation and creativity. 4.7. Courses program perceptions. 4.8. Problems in the curriculum and lack of funding. 4.9. Teachers' role and qualifications. 4.10. Job prospects for visual artists. 5. Conclusions. 5.1 Limitations and ideas for further research. References

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## 1. Introduction

Considering the etymology of the word university, it corresponds precisely to the Latin word *universitas*, translated to English, as universal, whole, all-embracing; this origin asserts the common understanding of university as a place-entity and fundamentally capable to encompass the entire fields of knowledge (Buti, 2009). The generalised idea of the university as a universal entity capable of accommodating and articulating such fields of knowledge in its embodiment does not explain how different yet associated fields are integrated into the overarching supra-structure. It also does not offer any insight into how these fields are placed within a hierarchical institutional context and to the various degrees of autonomy and subordination witnessed in relation to each individual academic and political setting. This translation and commodification of knowledge into status via performance has been given greater visibility through continued marketing policies both on a national and global stage (Camnitzer, 2012; Basbaum, 2013).

In addition, this generalized idea appears to conceal the existence of performative imbalance within its supra-structure; an inequality that can result in complex issues of evaluation in terms of assessment of intrinsic value (both internal and external) of departments within their respective faculties and has an impact on student experience due to justification of resources (Buti, 2022).

It is possible that the arts are more difficult to define than other branches of education. Even if we believe we understand what art is all about, it may be difficult to establish a coherent description of art. It may be even more difficult to determine what knowledge the arts may provide. When we think of art, we typically limit ourselves to visual arts such as paintings. However, the arts encompass disciplines such as music, performance art, drama, literature, dance, and film. This will have an im-

pact on the dynamics between the author, the artwork, and the audience as well as the type of knowledge that is transmitted. When it comes to the creation and acquisition of knowledge within the arts, this dynamic interaction is crucial. Thus, when it comes to the creation and acquisition of knowledge within the arts' departments, this dynamic interaction is worth analysing during the academic studies of visual arts students.

This study will examine the imbalances in the evaluation process that are now present in art departments and among artists, as well as how they relate to the academic contexts and techniques used to create meaning and comprehend discerned value. Instead of analysing a dematerialized context to show how departments of art/art practitioners engage with such academic surroundings, the researchers avoided making generalisations by concentrating on two distinct institutional contexts in Brazil.

Researchers began by studying source material such as texts, articles, and testimony produced by art-related academic faculty. Second, researchers developed an interview guide used in interviewing visual art students of each institutional context, and further analysed its response data. As a result of these preliminary processes, it was possible to detect and ascertain commonalities and concerns across the program.

The investigation yielded varied results because the connection between art departments/art practitioners and academic environments has been fostered and regulated by numerous administrations, agencies, and regulations. These diverse answers are also intrinsically tied to the diversity of each institution's historical, political, and educational dimensions (Barbosa, 2018).

This article will expose how some of these factors have shaped different approaches toward the role and positioning of departments of art/art practitioners as found within the umbrella of specific academic frameworks. The product of creative research has challenges in being recognised as "real" research in the fiercely competitive and frequently conventional academic environment. The conventional textual manner of documenting the underlying processes and ideas is frequently required for recognition.

The goal is to demonstrate how research on art, specifically that related to visual arts programs and their outcomes, has frequently been under evaluated by the generic and established assessment framework as applied in academic contexts, as well as other education and academic issues that could be detected through relevant research questions.

It might be interesting to start by posing the following queries: What types of knowledge do universities encourage? What teaching and learning methods and systems in the arts are still used in academia today? What connection exists in academia between theory and practice? What connections do academic institutions and the academic community make to the social, political, and cultural environment? What effects does the university system have on how identity, the body, and desire are regulated? And finally, which research areas, councils, and academies validate or support these topics? Theoretically, there is a lot of evidence to support the artists in general and their contributions to university. But are today's universities really accepting the idea of using art as a system or approach for conducting research?

This paper will mainly focus on answering these four interrelated questions:

1. Why has artistic research been underestimated, and consequently comparatively undervalued within conventional mainstream academic settings?
2. What role does artistic research play in academic settings?
3. Is the current academic evaluation framework unappropriated for assessing the nature and requirements of artistic research?
4. Are students supportive of their learning inside their own departments?

## 2. Literature review

An important stage and point of departure of this current research was the literature review of existing texts, mostly essays, published by art practitioners who have dedicated their intellectual production to both teaching in academia, as well as actively interacting with museums, galleries, and other contemporary art institutions

When academics discovered these valuable works, they noticed that the content was a comprehensive attempt to analyse the specificity of artistic knowledge and its accompanying visual thinking. Above all, what makes this material a rich source of reference is that they were written out of intense interaction between their Art practice and also within the framework of academic faculties; hence it reveals and is witness to common frictions, negotiations, and ideations that they have endured throughout their inner experiences and throughout their professional academic career.

Likewise, the material studied also offers insights into the status of visual thinking within the scope of academia and similar institutional environments. On reading, two general attitudes have been revealed: firstly, an observation that considers the image as a simple illustration of a notional concept or an idea; and secondly, that that overlooks its communicative potential due to a disregard for its autonomy to produce knowledge (Fabris, 1991; Buti, 2005; Kossovitch, 2014). Therefore, it suggests that academia's prime difficulty in acknowledging the particularity of visual thinking is a continued "non-recognition of the autonomy of art", that is to say, its capacity to communicate through exclusive semantic means: lines, colours, lights, volumes, layers, etc. According to the definition of Fabris (1991), visual thinking is a coherent, integrated thought system providing its own language, endowed with specific laws, wholly self-sufficient, yet also capable of contributing to the development of collective thinking as other modalities such as political and mathematical thought.

It is important to draw attention that the studied texts define visual thinking as being intrinsically related to the art practitioner as a producer of knowledge via the particularity of his/her creative practice, and also through works and/or actions and individual processes. Such key activity can be accompanied by the word, but it also must be sufficient by itself (Buti, 2005). It is imperative to highlight the value of such constructive elements of visual thinking that are not the same as those that rule verbal communication and, in its turn, texts are not the exclusive possibility to communicate thoughts (Fabris, 1991).

Nevertheless, whoever intends to understand how academic production is generally authenticated inside the academic settings should scrutinise its language policies, its established modalities, and what makes it eligible (Larossa, 2003). Overall, the hegemony of the technical-scientific method has imposed a conceptual framework that causes the exclusion of other modalities. According to the analyses of

Larrosa (2003), in western philosophy's history, the technical-scientific format of intellectual production defeated other text modalities which had widely contributed to philosophy during the renaissance and baroque periods; such as moral epistles, philosophical dialogues, confessions, spiritual precepts, essays, and short treatises genres. These genres were discredited as legitimate products of reasoning and became obsolete and inadequate forms.

However, with respect to the visual arts inside academic settings, the “misunderstanding” is much older. It consists of a long-term social problem that unfolds everlasting manifestations which consider the status of manual work inferior to the status of intellectual activity (Buti, 2005). In fact, it is possible to retrieve the misconception that deems manual activity inferior to intellectual activity back to slavery (Ivins, 1969). When the former was the slave's function and the latter was the freeman's privilege. Seemingly, such social problems are the roots of equivocal assumptions that oppose hand and head, manual and intellectual, practice and theory, execution and reflection, “misunderstanding” that ultimately fostered inside the academic settings the opposition between image and text (Buti, 2005; Mubarak, 2019).

This disjunction persists in the present pragmatic understanding of academic productivity. Since the academic context has been ruled by the mean of production's logistics, art departments – as other academic departments – have a target to obtain high rates of employability for their students; nevertheless, it becomes evident that the art marketplace is not able to absorb such a huge demand in comparison to the number of seats available in the related art academic programs (Camnitzer, 2012). In the same way, demonstrating a good performance as an academic faculty and/or student does not assure accomplishment in the art marketplace; and vice versa, being a successful art practitioner in the art marketplace does not ensure good performance as an academic faculty and/or student (Buti, 2009).

In our present day, art departments are integrated into the entire academic system. Equally, the most prominent higher education institutions also have their corresponding art departments and other related departments such as multimedia, visual communication, and schools of design. However, the presence of art in universities is owing to another misunderstanding; its inclusion is simply accepted due to a questionable trust in the universal applicability of scientific research methodology (Buti, 2005). Therefore, the eventual cost for such framed coexistence within academia is that art research is constrained to fit into a framework to which it does not belong. This observational fact echoes at all levels of academic activities (Buti, 2005; Assumpção, 2020).

This fact demonstrates the incompatibility of the evaluation as one key imbalance of departments of art and art practitioners inside mainstream academic settings. The academic criteria of evaluations and its productivity benchmark – if considered in generic terms – does not suitably apply to the rigorous domains of artistic production. It suggests that universities, oriented by a cohesive tradition of technical-scientific and neo-liberal productivism, are still not able to find a workable and effective approach or operational policy to fully integrate departments of art, and their associated art practitioners, together with the specificity of their artistic provision of knowledge inside their system (Camnitzer, 2012; Basbaum, 2013).

Art has inherent criteria that cannot be always applicable to a broader spectrum of general academic rules. In the specific assessment of artworks, criteria reside in the essential core values of its processes, conceptions, technical abilities, and operations, together with documented results and eventual consequences. The assessment of art-

works is not effectively or efficiently quantifiable; whereas in academia everything has to be measured, and whatever is immeasurable is considered insignificant (Assumpção, 2020).

Such a problem of criteria has generated a sense of dilemma in academia (Buti, 2009; Basbaum, 2013). In order to resolve this situation, higher education institutes have requested the annexation of artworks with additional supplementary writing of reports, therefore, turning the artwork which is supposed to be the central activity into a partial and marginalised requirement. The artwork is a secondary annex and only able to be appreciated in accordance with a parallel text. A text that both redefines and subsumes the original work. Nevertheless, even an excellently written report, even if it has followed the most absolute scientific methodology, cannot assure the quality of any artwork (Buti, 2009).

We do not assume that the creation of artworks together with texts should be avoided. Or to suggest that artists cannot explore exclusively theoretical writing as reflection, as long these are all decisions made by the artist or an inner necessity inherently created for the development of a particular artwork process. Writing as an extension of creativity. It is important to emphasise that the demand for elements beyond the scope of particular artistic research can undermine its visual thinking and the eventual performance of an entire artistic project (Buti, 2009).

Moreover, everyone interested in Art knows how important direct contact with artworks is necessary for a rich aesthetic perception and apprehension of their meanings (Buti, 2005). In effect the translation via text redefines the origins of the research and behaves as a form of intermediary filter, further distancing the viewer/observer/assessor from the essence of the art.

### **3. Methodology of research**

#### **3.1. Semi-structured in-depth interviews**

The qualitative methodology has been chosen as it best suits the objective of this research in seeking to describe and clarify human experience as it manifests itself in people's lives (Busetto *et al.*, 2020). It is a systematic and objective way of describing phenomena that allows the researcher to gain a better understanding of the data (Eppich *et al.*, 2019; Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik, 2021). In-depth interviewing is a popular method for collecting qualitative research data (DeJonckheere and Vaughn, 2019, Eppich *et al.*, 2019). Interviews can be unstructured, highly structured, or semi-structured, with the latter being the most commonly used. A successful semi-structured in-depth interview requires a well-designed guide that includes predetermined questions while allowing for flexibility to explore emerging topics related to the research question (DeJonckheere and Vaughn, 2019, Eppich *et al.*, 2019).

Semi-structured in-depth interviews have been conducted as it helps in answering "why" questions (DeJonckheere and Vaughn, 2019). Besides that, semi-structured interviews encourage the use of creative thinking and meaningful reflection in relation to research's broader ethical, methodological, and theoretical components (Galletta, 2013).

The present research was initially developed and influenced by the perceptions and experiences acquired by all the researchers within the scope and intellectual con-

text of academic visual arts education; both as students, and posteriorly, as academic faculties. In order to elaborate their analysis, researchers have undertaken a literature review on specifically selected texts related to art education and the integration of art departments within the academic context. It is also worth mentioning that the majority of the reading material was written by academic faculties that have taught courses and disciplines related to visual arts, as well as active art practitioners interacting largely with museums, galleries, and other contemporary art institutions.

On completion of this preliminary analysis, the researchers concluded that it would be important to compare these reading materials with contemporary testimonials taken from visual art students, hence creating a new resource of comparative data that can be assessed to reflect multiple points of view; while considering both the stance of existing academic faculties and students.

### 3.2. Data gathering

An online interview was created and conducted with 10 visual art postgraduate (PG) students currently enrolled in Master's Degree and PhD programs at Brazilian public universities between the months of May and August of 2022, see Table 1. Among the programs, the PG program in visual arts of the School of Communication and Arts of the University of São Paulo (PPGAV-ECA-USP) and the associated program in visual arts of the Federal University of Pernambuco and Federal University of Paraíba (PPGAV-UFPE-UFPB); consequently, ranging two different regions of Brazil (e.g., Southeast and Northeast).

Table 1. Participants

Participants	Age	Gender	Program	Institution
P1	46	F	PhD	University of São Paulo
P2	40	M		
P3	26			
P4	29			
P5	40		PhD	
P6	42	F	Master	Federal University of Pernambuco and Federal University of Paraíba
P7	32			
P8	55			
P9	30			
P10	24			

The 10 participants agreed to participate anonymously sharing their experiences and challenges faced during their research. After 10 interviews, data saturation was achieved as it demonstrated to be enough information to replicate the study (O'Reilly and Parker, 2013), so no new information can be obtained (Guest *et al.*, 2006). The online interview was conducted with students who were developing "practical research

in visual arts” projects. The interview was all in Portuguese and did not exceed 30 minutes with each interviewee (Jamshed, 2014) and it was conducted via Zoom platform.

#### 4. Results and discussion: Students’ expectations and reflections on Arts, education and learning

##### 4.1. Context

It is important to contextualise the Brazilian public universities implicated in this research since it reflects relevant information related to the socio-political and economical differences between the Brazilian regions of Southeast and Northeast. Similarly, as will be discussed further, the degree of autonomy of art departments sometimes can be related to their seniority, their position at the time of existence and insertion in the academic context as well as the institutional circumstances of their programs.

Table 2. Comparison in the number of students and teaching-learning spaces.

	PPGAV-ECA-USP	PPGAV-UFPE-UFPB	
Enrolled Master’s Students	73	42	
Enrolled PhD Students	71	-	
Classrooms	6	5	1
Art Studio Spaces	14	9	7
Exhibition Space	3	3	3

The PPGAV-ECA-USP localised in the Southeast Brazilian region was the fore-runner program of this country, establishing its Master’s degree program in 1972 (which remains the single national program for 13 years) and establishing its PhD program in 1980 (which remains the single national program for 15 years). On the other hand, the PPGAV-UFPE-UFPB was created in 2010, offering the Master’s degree program and is currently in process of creating the PhD program. Despite limitations, the PPGAV-UFPE-UFPB, along with the PG program in Visual Arts of the Federal University of Bahia represents the few PG programs existing and responding to the demand of the nine Northeast Brazilian states. Number of enrolled students and allocated physical spaces in each program is presented in Table 2.

PPGAV-ECA-USP offers four times as many studio-based courses as theoretical courses, nevertheless, PPGAV-UFPE-UFPB offers twice as many theoretical courses as studio-based ones, see Table 3.

Table 3. Practical and theoretical courses offered in 2022.

Courses	PPGAV-ECA-USP	PPGAV-UFPE-UFPB
Practical	8	3
Theoretical	2	6
Total	10	10



PPGAV-ECA-USP provides approximately 170% more studio-based courses than PPGAV-UFPE-UFPB. This is because PPGAV-ECA-USP places greater emphasis on validating and accepting “non-traditional research outcomes,” such as exhibitions, installations, videos, photobooks, and so on, as assignments.

The art studio spaces associated with the studied institutions were originally established for the use of undergraduate courses. As PG programs were subsequently introduced, these art studio spaces have also met the needs of PG courses and their students. In both PPGAV-ECA-USP and PPGAV-UFPE-UFPB, the eligibility of PG students to use the art studio spaces is conceded by the students’ guide and their availability is planned by the coordination of UG and PG programs of each institution.

At USP, all studios and labs can accommodate a maximum of 30 students, except for the Inkjet Printing Studio which has a maximum capacity of 15 students. In contrast, UFPE and UFPB have a maximum capacity of 25 students for all their spaces. Both USP and UFPB are equipped with two different Multimedia Suite Studios, whereas UFPE has two separate spaces dedicated to drawing and painting. USP has 14 spaces dedicated to various visual arts studios and labs. As illustrated on Table 4, UFPE and UFPB have 50-60% fewer spaces dedicated to studios and labs compared to USP.

Table 4. PG art studio and lab spaces in the three studied universities.

Art Studio/Lab	USP	UFPE	UFPB
Sculpture	·	·	
Woodcut Printing and Etching	·	·	·
Lithography	·	·	
Carpentry	·		
Ceramic	·	·	·
Painting/Drawing	·	..	
Technical Drawing	·		
Serigraphy	·		
Art Installation	·		
Multimedia Suite	..	·	..
Video			·
Photo	·		
Photographic Darkroom	·	·	
Inkjet Printing Studio	·		
Natural pigment		·	
Experimental and Creative Practices			·
Applied Arts			·

· one space available .. two spaces available

Moreover, the focus on studio-based education at PPGAV-ECA-USP, along with the university's significantly higher number of PG students in visual arts, which

amounts to 75% of the total, as indicated in Table 2 (144 PG students versus 42 at UFPE and UFPB), reinforces the university's comprehensive approach to art research and production.

## 4.2. Arts practice as a site of knowledge

Participant P1 states that her department of visual arts has considered non-traditional research outcomes formats (exhibitions, installations, videos, photo books, etc) as thesis, dissertations, and capstone projects. A point also raised by P2, P3 and P5 noting that it can be challenging and might even require the official agreement of the supervisor. All agree that in general it is difficult to validate image-based work in the academic context, which is not the case when validating traditional text formats. P3 added that it is not always possible to promote the kind of knowledge produced by artistic practices into the traditional academic framework. He notices that it causes a sort of parallel development, which drifts away from the knowledge resulting from the process of artistic practice.

P1 asserts that since the 80s it has accepted artwork in different formats as academic productions regardless of any textual annex or report. Nevertheless, the school attempts to motivate students to produce a testimonial on the creative process in order to share the artistic references and the particular discussions addressed by the work.

It has become clear in the present research, especially noted by the responses given in the interviews, that for visual art students there is an ultimate need for studio-based courses as well as the institutional validation and acceptance of “non-traditional research outcomes” such as exhibitions, installations, videos, and photo-books as means of the artistic language autonomous semantic and related visual thinking. Hence, students develop their own artistic knowledge through the visual arts as they learn to critically reflect on their own experiences with the work of artists. As they become more sophisticated, they learn to express and discuss their experiences through the visual arts.

All participants believe that their artistic endeavors served as a repository of knowledge. The artistic skills acquired do not match the expectations of two participants (P7 and P8). In their opinion, the outcome of their art practice is a knowledge base, but not enough knowledge. Additionally, P4 raised the issue of bridging the knowledge acquired throughout the program to practical employability skills. Students in the Visual Arts learn by creating and responding to artworks, getting inspiration from their surroundings. They experiment with and learn about visual arts, skills, techniques, and processes, as well as materials, as they explore a variety of shapes, styles, and situations.

## 4.3. Traditional vs non-traditional research outcomes formats

By comparing both programs – PPGAV-ECA-USP and PPGAV-UFPE-UFPB – the interview responses demonstrated that the seniority of PG programs, the position at the time of existence and insertion in the academic context, can be an indicator of the autonomy of assessment for the Brazilian context of art department in public universities studied here; therefore, senior programs present better possibilities of val-

idation of “non-traditional research outcomes” as it has been apparently a common practice in the program of PPGAV-ECA-USP since the 80s in the host institution and does not happen the same in the much younger PPGAV-UFPE-UFPB.

#### **4.4. Connections between Art and teaching**

It should go without saying that a high level of creativity is required for an artist's work at all levels. It is possible that the need for extensive creativity in effective teaching is not as obvious.

The link that connects the concepts of art and education is even less obvious. The relationship between art and teaching is succinctly mentioned by participants. Instead of quoting philosophers or artists, they described the ideas in their own words. They all agree that teacher and artist are two intertwined identities, which comes in line with Simpson *et al.* (2005) idea of the teacher as artist. These crucial connections outline an integrated process that combines passionate teaching with a creative understanding of how learning occurs for both the teacher and the students (Ben Ghida *et al.*, 2023; Ben Ghida, 2023).

Additionally, they had a propensity to view art as a thing, a product, or an extra-curricular activity. P4 mentioned her main difficulty as a student has been clarifying how to bridge the knowledge acquired throughout the program to practical possibilities of employability.

The patterns of learning that are encouraged by arts education are not well documented. The questions of what the arts can teach and what lessons students may learn through the arts must be addressed by arts educators. Teachers must therefore determine and document the various knowledge levels that students learn when studying art. Several studies did not carefully record what and how teachers taught in the arts, nor did they properly evaluate the extent of students' learning outcomes in comparison to other classrooms.

#### **4.5. Perspectives on the Creative Art classes and pedagogy**

According to Guilford (1950), Sternberg and O'Hara (1999), and Runco and Jaeger (2012), creativity is the capacity to present novel viewpoints, create ideas that are both valuable (useful, good, adaptable, appropriate) and original (new, unusual, novel, unexpected), and raise new questions. Research from the past has shown that creativity, self-direction, critical thinking, and innovation are now considered to be essential for education and one of the fundamental skills valued by advocates of 21st century learning. Understanding the creative processes in the classroom depends heavily on teachers' perceptions of creativity. All participants demonstrated cognitive maturity and agreed that the development of creativity is an essential component of their learning process. For them, the teachers' role is to foster creativity in their classes to allow their students to blossom. P1 argued that this was the case in earlier conceptions that valued students' creativity in the forms of music, art, literature, or dance.

It has already been noted in a number of earlier studies (Soh, 2017; Tirri *et al.*, 2017; Ben Ghida, 2020; García-Huidobro and Shenffeldt, 2022) how important creativity is to the educational environment and teaching methods of the twenty-first

century. According to Shin and Jang (2017), who cite Trilling and Fadel (2009: 5): “Creativity has become one of the core competencies recognised by proponents of 21st century education, as it equips students with the ability to cope with an unpredictable future”.

#### **4.6. Perspectives on artistic development: Developing the ingredients of innovation and creativity**

Overall, participants are dissatisfied with their artistic development in the classroom. They all agree that innovation and creativity are essential to their success as visual artists, but they remain dissatisfied with their learning experience. Participants mentioned that they frequently struggled to think of themselves as artists or as being creative. Students frequently classified the arts as a soft science and an emotional activity. Although many students contend to value the arts, they believe that their understanding of the arts as a tool for complex thought and experience was lacking in their initial course work.

P1, P2, P4, and P5 are aware that earning a PhD or MA increases the likelihood of finding employment in the field of academic education. While P6, P7, and P8 remain hostile and unimpressed about the fundamental idea of achieving a higher diploma in order to secure a better job placement. P3 clarifies that visual artists with a Master or a PhD have low prospects of job placement except in the field of academic education, sometimes even in museums, cultural centres, and institutions related to heritage. When asked if they had learned how to inspire creativity, they stated that their teachers frequently expect them to:

- Ask questions;
- Be inquisitive, show their curiosity;
- Be open to new possibilities, imagine, and guess; and,
- Accept the possibility of failure and rejection.

According to research, creative people tend to doubt themselves a lot, be ambitious, impulsive, risk-takers, independent, imaginative, hostile, curious, self-assured, versatile, and highly open (Abler *et al.*, 2006; Prabhu *et al.*, 2008; Cassandro and Simonton, 2010; Li *et al.*, 2015). They are able to produce work on a wider range of subjects that is highly original, distinct, and more universally recognized by the general public as a result of their characteristics (Cassandro and Simonton, 2010).

One approach to studying visual artistic creativity focuses on the artist's own behavioural characteristics. This entails looking for personality traits that might be associated with a person's current level of creative achievement or future artistic success. These characteristics can be evaluated by teachers through observation or standardised or pre-determined personality scales.

Accurate knowledge of teachers' conceptions of creativity and the function of assessment in the arts would help to guide educational policy, training initiatives, and learning outcomes assessment.

#### 4.7. Courses program perceptions

P6 like P10 states the lack of studio-based courses related to artistic practices in its PG program: “The lack of studio-based courses related to artistic practices in its PG program. A program that offers more theoretical course options and disciplines, and consequently demands an excessive volume of traditional text-based outcomes and conventional articles” (P6).

She also points out the lack of emphasis on artistic practice and the non-valorisation of the educational contribution of exhibitions to students of visual arts. P6 also asserts that the demotivation of such practices inside its program is due to the overvaluation of scientific articles and texts formatted for conventional publications

P10 criticised a program that offers more theoretical course options, and disciplines and consequently demands an excessive volume of traditional text-based outcomes and conventional articles. She believes that as an art practitioner that was admitted originally to a program that should approach “practical research in visual arts”, such a pedagogical approach has undermined the development of projects.

P7 also criticises the excess of mandatory courses that contribute little or nothing to “practical research in visual arts”. According to P7, constraining students to such a pedagogical approach is unproductive, and sometimes even traumatic. She concludes that unnecessary courses as well as administrative workload impair the research development of both students and faculties

P9 asserts the predominance of the theoretical curriculum in a program that should emphasise “practical research in visual arts”. She also mentions the problems of acceptance of non-traditional formats of dissertations and as far it is concerned, a certain despotic and authoritarian approach of the library’s management that refuses to incorporate non-traditional dissertations that were already approved by the panel of examiners. P9 believes that the presence of more faculties of artistic practises is ultimately important for adequate evaluation of disciplines and dissertations, ensuring proper assessment of art practitioners' research outcomes within academia.

#### 4.8. Problems in the curriculum and lack of funding

There is no doubt that teaching art in higher education is crucial. The main objective of art education is to increase student teachers' competence in the art studio as well as in related disciplines. However, the implementation of approaches in higher art education programs and the achievement of a good balance between various disciplines are both controversial.

Participants debated the importance of art education in a school's curriculum. They all think that teachers can become strong advocates for the value of art and improve student outcomes by researching the numerous benefits of incorporating more creativity into the classroom and improving their teaching methods. But all participants agree that there are problems in the curriculum, in the teachers’ preparation, and in the distribution of funds. Sternberg (2007) asserts that because students draw connections based on their personal experiences, they are better equipped to relate to real problems.

According to P1, the school’s library faces difficulties in incorporating and storing multiple formats, insofar as it has not been restricted to a standard format for

the various academic productions to its archive. She comments that comparing the department of arts with other departments, there is a disproportionate distribution of funds, hence the department of arts receives less than is granted to others. P9 added that the central government's lack of investments and funds for public universities in general and specific programs that could promote the availability of scholarships and infrastructure for studio-based courses.

Moreover, P8 talks about how there are many more theoretical disciplines than courses in studio art that are more practice-based. As a result, according to her, the majority of the faculty was not aware of the artistic practices that the program's participants had developed. She contends that this fact calls into question the objectivity of the evaluation of research projects because the examiner cannot contribute to a subject if they are unaware of its process.

Hutchens addresses the issue of implementing change in the academic environment (1997). He contends that if art education is to succeed in the twenty-first century, academics and faculty from related fields must support it. Hutchens (1997) also emphasises the importance of change and how art educators made the subsequent program improvements. He asserts that the time has come for higher education to begin scrutinising its own processes.

On another note, P5 emphasises the importance of academic members and the panel of examiners understanding and being sensitive to how creative practices differ from scientific research. She also acknowledges the issues surrounding the contribution of visual arts to society and academia. She asserts that finding solutions to these problems should be prioritised, especially at a public university. She came to believe that the issues surrounding visual artworks' contributions to academia and society should be addressed by seeking solutions within the creative process itself, as this would serve to validate its very existence.

#### **4.9. Teachers' role and qualifications**

According to the art education literature, teachers frequently complete required course work successfully but without a thorough understanding of the course materials and resources. Art teacher education should be more than just instruction in specialised knowledge and skills (Grauer, 1998).

Another theme that contributed to students' perspectives on visual art and education coming together was how students describe the skills and roles of a teacher. This theme arose from the students' growing understanding of the art program's disciplines, instruction, learning, and visual art.

As they engaged in the arts and learning at the university level, students began fusing their ideas and talking about the experience of becoming a teacher through creativity, competence, and passion, in addition to a more articulate understanding of the process. As a result, excellent art teachers must have a thorough understanding of the subjects they teach. The argument made by Grauer (1998: 350) that "Teachers' knowledge about art, for example, did not seem as strong an indicator of willingness to learn about art education as were the teachers' beliefs about what art education entailed" is supported by this evidence. Hence, prospective teachers must have a structured knowledge of art and art disciplines.

#### 4.10. Job prospects for visual artists

Data from interviews demonstrate a gap between undergraduate courses, students' career expectations, and their perceptions of career development. Participants acknowledged the 'wide range of abilities learnt in their classrooms but expressed difficulty focusing and controlling their skills or applying them in real practice. The alignment of visual artists' professional development priorities and needs suggests that many professional development programs could be delivered collaboratively. Participant P3 articulated clearly how studying in a university environment and the pressure of undertaking written academic exam changed his views about artistic practice. Still completing his PhD, P3 was not sure if there is any future ahead for him as a researcher or as an artist.

Due to the necessity of maintaining a strong practical focus while preparing graduates for employment in a highly competitive environment, following art related courses offered by universities are important. However, graduates must face the fact that performance is one of the several tasks necessary to have a long-lasting profession. The findings are presented in the context of multifaceted careers, and the essay calls for practising artist academics to involve students in career development and the building of professional identities. Comments on mentors and networks emphasise the significance of creative capital in developing and maintaining careers in the arts. According to respondents, all arts students should receive pedagogy instruction. However, they stressed the importance of: credits toward teachers' qualification, mentorship, formal pedagogy training options, and opportunities for practice.

### 5. Conclusions

The objective of this essay was to establish an understanding of how departments of art and art practitioners have been accepted within academia and to further explain possible situations of subordination. It also questions the possibility of a fundamental inadequacy in evaluating artistic research. Due to limitations having been created by the mapping of existing methods of assessment as found in other more scientific criteria, a criteria alien and at odds with the act of fine art creation, this same inadequacy is also a key factor and further amplification of Arts own self marginalization.

Although some academic institutions have already considered artistic research into the category of "Non-Traditional Research", a large number of higher education institutions remain unaware of its possibilities and potential. The majority of higher education institutions quantify intellectual productivity and academic performance based only on indexed publications, citations and impact factors metrics. In opposition to textual citation, visual citation cannot be retrieved and tagged by indexed systems (Buti, 2009; Assumpção, 2019). Artificial intelligence is able to identify textual citations but the same cannot be said about visual citation when it requires sophisticated image literacy. Despite image-making ability to encompass a high degree of intertextuality and artworks being cited visually in countless ways, yet, visual citations will offer no metric data back to their original visual references.

This also reveals that reading images is a complex task that requires sophisticated levels of image literacy. Not every viewer is able to understand, nor perceive

an image as a materialisation of a thinking process and its associated process. The result of which is both the production of knowledge, and as a consequence extending understanding. The lack of image literacy within the driving mechanics of academia demotivates artists working at higher education institutes, where, no matter how dedicated to their artistic research, their detailed production, due to the inherent imbalance between image-text, will never achieve the standards of traditional established evaluation metrics, that is to say, they are unlikely to achieve any equivalent institutional recognition (Buti, 2009).

There are twofold risks evident from this specific research intervention, and associated issues that are generated by this ongoing dilemma: The first is related to the demoralisation of artists who operate within academia and associated contexts, where their negative experience and isolation have caused their forced withdrawal from their art practice. Furthermore, departments have been replaced by other dominant faculties, and more explicitly, who share agendas that are not compatible with art practice. We can extend this discussion even further and question if art can actually be taught as a mere theoretical subject (Buti, 2009). Given that future students will no longer find an effective art syllabus, with a focus on practice, in higher educational institutions, and therefore, the effectiveness of art education found in academia is therefore truly at stake (Roeger and Kim, 2013). And for the Artists who decide to continue to remain on the inside, their presence marginalised by their host institutions, and have no other option but to divide their time and productivity between other imposed activities that are outside of their core endeavors (Zimmerman, 2009).

Secondly, the same dilemma that impaired art departments undermine the development of the entire knowledge domains, a fact that drives both academia and societies into myopic consideration which asserts a continued misunderstanding that has severed hand from head, manual from intellectual, practice from theoretical, and execution from reflection (Sennett, 2009). If universities really have an interdisciplinary project – a real intention is necessary rather than mere rhetorical argument – the academic setting needs first to admit that other languages and practices are capable of producing knowledge.

The development of industrial capital and the crucial generic skills of teaching, performance, and art market entrepreneurship must be introduced throughout the undergraduate study, even though skills will be continuously developed in the industry. The highly associated results from the visual art cohorts suggest that collaborative early and lifelong learning in these core generic talents may be possible. A basic responsibility of educators is to prepare students for positive engagement across and beyond their chosen professional objectives. Students majoring in the visual arts field will need to develop a broad identity that frames professional achievement as a viable future option. Educators that are actively working in the industry are the best individuals to establish these connections.

### **5.1. Limitations and ideas for further research**

The results of the study should be considered in light of their limitations. If art departments have to conquer their autonomy throughout the years, it seems that such a maturation process is the result of an internal agreement of independent and appropriate evaluation criteria. A discussion of possible fundamentals for artistic research evaluation in this point results to be a subject of extreme interest, a sort of antidote



and after all a point of departure for possible future solutions to remedy and/or improve this current situation as found within academic contexts and their uncomfortable relationship with the Arts.

Furthermore, could there be a new way of understanding the teaching and learning experience in the arts, one that connects intersections between what is “academic” and “extra-academic” through the development of programs for training and critical discussion as alternatives to formal higher education in the arts? In the specific field of arts education, it is worth reconsidering the university teaching and learning experience by categorising its initiatives as those that, “within the university” or in collaboration with it, generate methodological intersections; and those that, “beyond the university”, take a more disruptive stance against the academic system in the arts, while proposing alternatives. This suggests that the future of art education is heavily influenced by the hybridization of institutions and, consequently, of methodologies. As a result, the thought that it can have an impact on the training of artists and cultural professionals is an essential topic for investigation.

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